

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

PILGRIMAGE

RELIGIONS AND PILGRIMAGES

John B. Chethimattam

PILGRIMAGE: A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL EXPERIENCE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

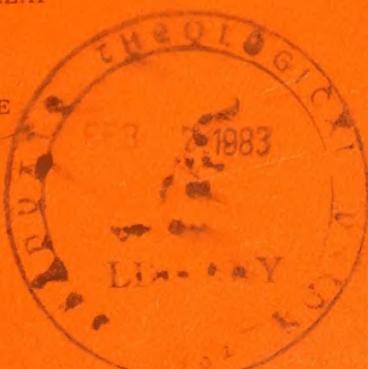
PILGRIMAGE IN ISLAM

George Koovackal

PILGRIMAGE TO SABARIMALAI

Zacharias P. Thundy

BOOK REVIEW ARTICLE



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JEEVADHARA

The Meeting of Religions

PILGRIMAGE

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Editorial

Today pilgrimages are back in fashion. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Sabarimala in the western ghats of Kerala every year. There is always a stampede of millions of pilgrims at the junction of Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad. Scholars and scientists who once used to scoff at Lourdes and Fatima are now flocking in great numbers in those places and accepting unhesitatingly the miracles reported there. Even the weekly audience of the Pope in Rome is attended by such unprecedented crowds that one wonders whether the age of secularism and religious scepticism is not already past and whether we are not entering a new era of religious fervour.

On the contrary we have to take seriously the complaint of the author of the *Imitation of Christ*: "Many set out on pilgrimage, but only few are made holy by it." There are a number of factors other than religious that enter into the phenomenon of religious pilgrimages. Greed and commercialism that exploit the credulity of gullible believers of all faiths create and popularize a great many pilgrim centres. The economic viability of certain nations depends to a great extent on the money brought in by the pilgrims. The restless curiosity for seeing places and peoples is another dynamic factor that transforms pilgrimages into simple tourism. But even with all these there is a core of authenticity in the great desire to visit holy places of one's religious tradition evinced by the followers of most of the World Religions. This basic religious factor in pilgrimages is the matter for discussion in this issue of *Jeevadharma*. Fundamentally it is the insight that man's worship of God is bound to space and time.

However it presents a certain paradox: It is at the same time a goodbye to one's home and to one's space-time bound existence, and also a search for that particular place and opportune time where and when God is most reachable. When a medieval pilgrim told his relatives "I am going", he meant he was leaving them with very little hope or prospect or return, thereby breaking the tyrannical or sweet bonds that linked him to his familiar surroundings and to one's past. The pilgrim is essentially a free man, wholly available for the sacred. Once he ritually said farewell he is not allowed to look back. The moment he sets foot on the road he is a renewed soul, rejuvenated

literally another person. This is characteristic of all departures that man can be fully himself only by departing from himself. Like a snake he has, from time to time, to slough his skin of familiar place-time conditions to attain a newness. Still he is in space and time. He has only exchanged the familiar places of his past for the holy places of God's self-disclosure, and transformed the ordinary time of hours, days and seasons into the sacred time of holy hours, feasts, holy seasons and even holy years. This is the function of pilgrimages and feasts and festivals.

But there is great diversity within the seeming uniformity of pilgrimages. In ancient Egypt thousands of years before the Christian era the head of the god Osiris was preserved in a shrine at Abydos near Cairo and people went to Abydos to visit their dead and many wished to be buried there after their death. In ancient Greece people made their pilgrimage to Asclepios seeking healing. The millions who visit the sixty seven main Hindu Pilgrimage centres of India have their life after death principally in mind. Buddhists traditionally made pilgrimages to the places connected with Buddha like his birth place and the bodhi tree under which he attained enlightenment in order to attain the same enlightenment. Jews travelled from far and near to Jerusalem, where the temple built by Solomon stood. For them pilgrimage was a going back to their past glorious history. The thirty four pilgrim psalms in the Bible express the great desire to return to the temple of the Lord, from which one is away at the moment. To this day every Muslim has as his life-ambition to visit Mecca and go seven times around the Kaaba the symbol of the alliance between Allah and mankind.

Penance is one of the dominating motives for pilgrimage. To the unusual hardships of the journey others too may be added such as abstinence from certain kinds of food and drink, fasts, and walking on one's knees part of the way. Special appreciation of the manifestation of the divine at a particular spot with the belief that God is more approachable there than elsewhere is the main point in some pilgrimages. Personal experience and spiritual growth is a common aim in all sacred journeys. But giving witness to a universal divine message intended for our age today is the principal concern of some of the modern pilgrimages like those of Lourdes and Fatima.

The different articles in this issue try to bring out these different aspects of pilgrimage which express the spirituality of the modern man.

Religions and Pilgrimages

Pope John Paul II made a historic pilgrimage to Fatima, Portugal, May 12–16, 1982, on the occasion of the anniversary of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin there to three children on May 13, 1917, which also coincided with the first anniversary of his miraculous escape from an assassin's attempt on his life on May 13, 1981 in St. Peter's Square, Rome. Justifying his pilgrimage the Pope said: "I seemed to recognize the coincidence of the dates a special call to come to this place, and so today I am here". But he saw the pilgrimage centre of Fatima in the general context of all holy places and pilgrim centres. Starting from John 19, 27: "And from that hour the disciple took her his own home", the Pope said: "There are many such dwelling places. They are of all kinds; from a special corner in the home or little wayside shrines adorned with an image of the Mother of God, to chapels and churches built in her honour. However, in certain places the Mother's presence is felt in a particularly vivid way. These places sometimes radiate their light over a great distance and draw people from afar. Their radiance may extend over a diocese, a whole nation, or at times over several countries and even continents. These places are the Marian sanctuaries or shrines".

Pilgrimages have always been a characteristic mark of the religious attitude of peoples. There is a general feeling that under certain circumstances God responds to prayer in a special way in certain specific places. So one has to make a pilgrimage to such places of divine favour, and the journey or pilgrimage to that place forms a certain unity with the visit or stay in the place. This emphasis on sacred places and the advisability of pilgrimages to such places is common to most religions, even to those that are radically divergent in their approach to the divine through ritual or mystical experience, devotional practices or metaphysical discourse, like Judaism and Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.

The crucial questions regarding holy places and pilgrimages are how the infinite and transcendent God can be localised and what relevance this space oriented practice has for leading man away from this perishable world to his eternal home. I shall briefly examine in this paper the philosophical and theological bases for the relative importance of sacred places and pilgrimages for the religious man as well as the particular theological orientations of different types of pilgrimages that evolved in course of time.

The Pedagogical Value of Sacred Places

The basic point about religion is that though it deals with God and transcendental aspects of reality it is above all a human phenomenon. Its basic problem is the ultimate meaning of human existence, and God comes in as the source of man's origin and the ultimate point of his return. As a being bound in space and time man's liberation too has to be worked out in space and time. Hence even the religions of the non-civilized peoples of the world, whose religious systems have no special names and are based mostly on customs, rites, myths and norms, make a clear distinction between profane space and sacred space: Profane space in which man finds himself at present is chaos, without structure or consistency, amorphous. Sacred space on the other hand, founds a new world "revealing a fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. Generally it is indicated through a certain hierophany, a manifestation of 'power' or "being" or "Real". Not only does it break up the continuity of profane space, but also creates an opening for communication between cosmic planes. The chaos is restructured into a cosmos. This sacred spot is determined by looking for a sign "from above". Sometimes an animal is let loose and allowed to wander and later sacrificed at the spot it comes to rest spontaneously, and the sacred space is erected. This centre is considered a sort of axis uniting this world with the transcendental world. This symbolism of the Centre provides a spacial orientation for man to look beyond the restricted concerns of this spatio-temporal existence.

This point of privileged divine presence founds what is a religious world, establishing both a horizontal point of reference

as well as a vertical axis of communication. This search for the sacred space is often seen as a repetition of the primordial act of creation by the gods. The gods laid out the things of the world according to a primeval divine model establishing order and harmony in a world of chaos and confusion. This divinely established order of things was somehow broken by human malice and the machinations of inimical forces. Man is, therefore, called upon to imitate what the gods did in the beginning in order to reestablish the original divine order of things.

This sense of the sacred order of things in places specially chosen by God is the primary concern of pilgrimages even in non-Christian religions. Man encounters God first of all in those places and situations where divine help is made available to him. Hence chief places of pilgrimage in religions are places of healing. Ganges waters were supposed to provide health and salvation to all who bathed in it, and the dead whose ashes were immersed in it were expected to attain eternal healing from the sickness of terrestrial life. The pool of Siloam is mentioned in the Gospels with the popular belief that any sick man who entered it after the angel had stirred its waters was expected to be cured of his sickness.

Similarly in the Graeco-Roman world Asclepius was the god of healing, and the important places of pilgrimage were Cos, Epidaurus, Pergamon, Tricca, Athens and Rome where he was supposed to provide healing to the pilgrims. Chief miracles reported in ancient times were mostly cures. But there were other centres of pilgrimage too providing solutions to difficult problems, like the oracles of Apollo at Dodona and Delphi and the temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Cicero mentions as the greatest contribution of Greece the pilgrimages to Eleusis which attracted thousands of young men, giving up for weeks the material comforts of this world in order to be initiated into the mysteries to secure a better lot after death.

The Christian Pilgrimages

In the beginning Christian worship was not centralized. It consisted mostly in the celebration of the Eucharist in the local community under the leadership of the bishop, and the universal

church was simply the communion of these local communities, through the constant correspondence between and occasional joint meetings of the heads of these churches. This concentration of attention on the local church was perhaps owing to an expectation of an imminent second coming of Christ and the end of the world, or more probably on account of the realization that in the Body of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist and in the celebration of Christ's Word people had everything needed for their salvation. Christ's humanity had replaced the Jerusalem temple which was the centre of pilgrimage for Judaism. In the ancient Church we do not find any signs of veneration of saints or martyrs, either.

This situation was drastically changed with the conversion of Constantine to Christianity. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire which came to be synonymous with Christendom. With this universalization of Christianity and the shifting of emphasis from the local community and the edifice of the local church to the world at large need arose to designate certain places as particularly worthy of the spiritual attention of people. Romans from their pre-Christian background brought to the church the search for the sacred places, and Christ became the new Asclepius. Initiation for Christian pilgrimage was given a royal impetus by St. Helena, mother of the emperor who made it her life-ambition to discover the Cross on which Christ died and made several pilgrimages to Palestine. Jerusalem and other holy places of Palestine immediately reached world fame and pilgrims were flocking thither from all parts of the world. This gave the church of Jerusalem considerable influence over the rest of Christendom and its liturgical practices and rites like the procession with palms on the Sunday before Easter and the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday. On the other hand, Rome itself which had a preeminence as the seat of the emperor and the place where St. Peter had established his see, had to create its own holy places: The church of the Holy Cross became the Roman Jerusalem and the Maria Maggiore the new Bethlehem, not to mention the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

In the beginning the principal motive for pilgrimage was to encounter the divine presence in a particular place or in the

personality of a holy individual. The Jews spread out all over the world had to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where Yahweh was present in the Holy of Holies. St. Paul after his conversion had to go to Jerusalem to get his authority approved by Peter and the other apostles. Visiting the burial places and memorials of saints, especially of martyrs became slowly the principal motive for pilgrimages. With the promulgation of penitential regulations for different kinds of sins and violations pilgrimage came to be considered a salutary penitential practice, since it would take a person away for sometime from the context of his sins and provide him with occasions to reflect on his life. Thus pilgrimages to the tombs of Ss Peter and Paul in Rome, Sergius in the Syrian desert, Thecla at Seleucia, Demetrius in Thessalonica, Felix at Nola and Martin at Tours became popular centres of pilgrimage. Since it was not possible for every one to visit such tombs and burial places an ingenious method was found to make those tombs available in many places by depositing relics from those tombs far and wide. Since the relics of the bodies of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin could not be had attention was turned to other aspects. Relics of the Holy Cross was distributed in different parts of the world. Pictures of the Mother of God, especially those reputed as painted by the Evangelist St. Luke made several spots on the globe celebrated as centres of pilgrimage.

General Characteristics of Pilgrimages

As a religious phenomenon pilgrimages present certain common general characteristics. First of all they belong, as with initiation ceremonies like Baptism and circumcision and *Upanayana*, to rites of passage or rites of transition, marked by three phases: (1) separation or the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in social structure or cultural condition, (2) an intervening liminal phase in which the ritual subject passes through a state which has few or none of the attributes of the past nor of the future, and (3) a final state of aggregation, in which the subject has rights and obligations of a clearly defined structural type. The pilgrim is an initiand entering a new and deeper level of existence, and at the end the pilgrim, like a novice in a religious order, is exposed to power-

ful sacral factors like shrines, images, rites, processions and ritual ablusions. The pilgrim surrounded by such powerful symbols may consciously grasp only a fraction of them, but through the reiteration of the symbolic expressions and through their very vividness becomes increasingly capable of entering into the spirit of the particular religion.

As Victor and Edith Turner remark in their *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, a fully mature pilgrimage system or "field" is comparable to a series of overlapping and interpenetrating ellipses whose common area of overlap has the shrine at its centre. Each of these ellipses constitutes a pilgrimage route, or "way" since even when the pilgrim returns the same way, psychologically his return route is different. Near the central shrine the ingoing routes become evermore beset with way stations, lesser shrines, chapels and the like, all designed to build up the load of religious feeling. The pilgrim's advance to the centre becomes slower and more arduous as he approaches it, stopping at several intermediary points with different rituals and ceremonies preparing himself cautiously for the ultimate sacred goal. When returning on the other hand, the pilgrim's aim is to reach home as swiftly as possible and his attitude is more of a tourist than of a devotee.

But the return has an aggregate aspect also. The curative or charismatic aspect of pilgrimage is not an end in itself, but only a way to a deeper level of religious participation. Even though he makes his return to his mundane life he is supposed to have made a spiritual step forward. The Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca becomes a haji with a certain superior status. In Christianity and Hinduism the pilgrim does not gain any superior status; he progresses, however, internally in his life-long spiritual pilgrimage.

A second common trait of pilgrimages is their close relationship with history, local, national and international. Even the diachronic process of each pilgrimage in the course of time relates to consecutive phases of the history with which it is encompassed. Jerusalem reemerged as a pilgrim centre with the expansion of the Byzantine influence to the East, and Rome

became a place of pilgrimage with the increase in international influence of the papacy. Emergence of Medieval pilgrim spots in Europe coincided with the establishment of the great monasteries and when these were suppressed in the Protestant revolution, and as the Franciscans, Augustinians and Dominicans moved to the New World there was mushrooming of pilgrim centres there, while new pilgrim centres of a different type appeared in Europe in the aftermath of the Counter Reformation.

Like all mass movements pilgrimages also produce great many legends, myths, folklore and even high culture literature: Each centre has its own written accounts of the origin of the pilgrimage, the miraculous events connected with it and the like which constitute the legend. Myths, on the other hand, are systematic oral traditions concerning those events, while folklore provides unsystematized tales and stories about the saints and happenings on the pilgrimage connected with the centre.

A further point to be noted about pilgrimages is that each one of them evolves with a certain inner organic dynamism, controlling it from within. It starts as it were by accident, marked by miracles, visions, martyrdoms and the like, and pilgrims arrive slowly, individually first and then in groups. With rumours and reports of miracles and favours increasing numbers arrive. Then authorities step in to organize the pilgrimages in groups, mark specific calendar dates, provide facilities, and set up even particular programmes like novenas, litanies, processions and other modes of devotion, which routinize and institutionalize the whole pilgrimage. In this process faith is often manipulated for political and economic ends. But even in the midst of such materialistic distortions and historical vicissitudes somehow the original inspiration and the fellowship of believers persist. Pilgrimage ideally is an individual good work, a charismatic event and not a purely social happening. The apparent capriciousness with which people decide to visit a shrine, the rich symbolism, spontaneous self-expression and the popular character of pilgrimage systems tend to make them suspect in the eyes of the orthodox authorities of religions, which maintain often an ambivalent attitude towards the extraordinary happenings and subsequent pilgrimages. Pilgrimage is too democratic

to conform to hierarchical prescriptions and are peripheral to the ritual or liturgical system as a whole. The ecclesiastical hierarchy often applies certain negative criteria to weed out false claims of visions and revelations. Integrity of character and psychological balance of the visionary, the conformity of the alleged revelations to traditional ecclesiastical teachings, the meaning and value of what is revealed for a life of faith, and factual evidence for the claimed happenings, are some of the things the ecclesiastical authority looks for. When these are absent the religious authority judges the visions and occurrences as "not worthy of credibility". When these are positively present, it may give a *nihil obstat*, which means: "There is nothing to show that it is not authentic, and so the devotions may continue". Even when the evidence is overwhelming and when miracles are shown to be unquestionably authentic as in the cases of Fatima and Lourdes, the most the religious authority would do is to state that the events that gave rise to the pilgrimages are worthy of human faith. The reason for this reluctance to go all the way to guaranteeing the supernatural character of visions and apparitions is that established religion does not want to tie its fortunes to the fickle perceptions of individuals and fast changing concrete situations of particular places and events. The Church does not stand or fall with them.

Theological Meaning of Pilgrimages

i. Pilgrimage, the Symbol of Unity and Fellowship

The theological meaning of holy places and pilgrimages differs according to their particular nature and their relationship to the traditional faiths they represent. Closest to the interests of traditional religion are those pilgrimages directed to the traditional centres of its origin or the seat of its central government. Judaism has been a localised religion restricted to Palestine, and in order to maintain the unity of the chosen people it encouraged its members to visit annually its holy places. Among the various holy places of Israel Jerusalem emerged as the Holy City with its one temple for all Jews spread out in the world. It was also the place of origin for Christianity. After the first centuries when de-Judaization was the ideal for Christians and pilgrimages did not play any significant role,

Christians too gained a sense of their Palestinian roots, and a pilgrimage to Jerusalem became a life-ambition for every Christian. But, as we have already noted, when Rome emerged as the seat of the Pope, it tried to replace Jerusalem as a pilgrim centre, by duplicating as far as possible the holy places of Palestine and offering spiritual favours like indulgences and penitential remissions as inducements to pilgrims. From time to time special jubilee years were proclaimed with special functions and ceremonies to attract a larger mass of the faithful to Rome.

Similarly Mohammed transformed the pagan worship of the Daughters of God at Mecca into a centre of Muslim pilgrimage to provide a focus of unity and a network of communications between the far-flung Muslim lands. Islam made Mecca a mandala-like centre of the community of cobelievers, reinforcing the awareness of communion with fellow Muslims of other lands and peoples through participation in common rituals and ceremonies. In the same way the Hindu pilgrimages to Varanasi, Mount Kailas and other holy places are intended to emphasize the community of faith and fellowship of believers.

The theological meaning of such pilgrimage is succinctly stated by Pope John Paul II: "The pilgrimage to Fatima was need of my heart and at the same time a manifestation of the way that the Church follows, at the end of the current century, as the People of God bound to all mankind by the sense of a particular responsibility for the modern world". Besides this need for emotional identity with other Christians in the fellowship of faith, there are other values like the spirit of penance, detachment from the world, confidence in Divine Providence expressed in pilgrimages. Pope Pius XII stated in 1952: "The pilgrim's journey is long, and begins with a parting. He leaves his home,... then he sets off courageously... and so prayer makes its way to God more easily. The company of other pilgrims increases the ardour of soul and gives rise to prayer in common, singing... The pilgrimage reawakens in you the spirit of penance, the sense of Providence and trust in God. It instructs you afresh about the meaning of life: to turn away from the present, from everyday joys and sorrows, and to turn towards the goal whose radiance shines in you". The community in pil-

grimage represents the church on earth set in distress, imperfection, uncertainty and perplexity, yet not wandering aimlessly.

ii. Medieval Pilgrim Centres: Unity in Diversity

Over against the centripetal tendency of pilgrimages centred in Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca or Benares, there is also a centrifugal dimension of faith experience which seeks to envision the universal fellowship of believers as a communion of local communities. To counter balance the dominating role of Rome and Jerusalem, among the holy places of pilgrimage spread out in the world Donald Attwatter mentions "... Bruges (the Holy Blood), the Holy House at Loreto, our Lady's shrines at Einsiedeln (Switzerland), Genezzano (Italy), La Salette (France), Vailankanni (Madras), Oastacker (Belgium) and Montserrat (Spain), Ste. Anne de Beaupre' at Quebec, Ste Anne d'Auray and Paray-le- Monial (France), Croagh Patrick, St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg (Ireland)".

In 1061 a widow was instructed in a vision by our Lady to construct at Walsingham in England a replica of Mary's house of Annunciation at Nazareth, and the construction was reputedly executed with the help of angels. Ever since that time Walsingham attracted pilgrim crowds until the shrine was destroyed by Henry VIII. Similarly in 1291 the Holy House of Nazareth was itself transported by angels to a place in Dalmatia and from there after three years to Lauretum (from which the present title Loreto) creating a new pilgrim centre in Italy. Similar pilgrim centres mushroomed in Europe each with its own visions and miracles and attracting thousands of pilgrims. Economic, social, cultural and especially political factors played important roles in the rise and decline of such pilgrim centres.

But this creation of a polycentric system of pilgrimages to counterbalance the monocentric system is a universal phenomenon found in other religions too. Folk Islam made pilgrimages not only to Mecca but to tombs of holy men not only Muslim but also Hindu and Christian as well. Hinduism made almost every river and hill a holy place of pilgrimage.

This was to emphasize that God is not tied to one single spot, but is free to choose any place to manifest his glory and

communicate his grace. What Richard Pynson wrote about Walsingham may be true about every other place of pilgrimage with appropriate modifications:

O England great cause thou hast glad for to be
Compared to the Land of Promise, Sion,
 Thou attainest my grace to stand in that degree
 Through this gracious Lady's supportation
 To be called in every realm and region
 The Holy Land, Our Lady's Dowry:
 Thus art thou named of old antiquity.

When pilgrims visited different centres, the criss-crossing of pilgrimage ways formed by devotions of international repute had a bonding effect on the entire socio-cultural system. In the place of the monocentric Roman empire the medieval pilgrimages sacralized the polycentric system of feudalistic lords and kings. The universal church is not a uniform community, and the bishops are not mere governors appointed by the Pope. The actual church is the local church, the community of the faithful gathered around the Eucharist under the leadership of the Bishop who is a direct successor to the Apostles. The universal reality of the church is the communion of such local churches. People visiting different pilgrim centres existing under the authority of different local communities are asserting the unity in diversity of the Church of Christ.

iii. Interreligious Dimension of Pilgrimages

A number of pilgrimage centres that emerged between the 9th and 14th centuries in Europe and in the 16th century in Latin America have a common orientation, which Vincent de la Fuente, the 19th century historian of the Spanish cult of Mary, described as "the shepherd's cycle": In these the images of Mary are miraculously discovered by shepherds, cowherds and farmers, "in the ground by knocking a dirt clod aside, in caves while fetching lost sheep, in ponds, streams, on islands and trees". Often the shepherd is led to the discovery by a vision of the Virgin, by an unnatural light, an unexpected noise and the like. Most typical of these is discovery in 1326 in the

village of Guadalupe in Spain in an iron casket a statue of the Blessed Virgin, which had been sent by Pope Gregory the Great around 590 A. D. to his friend Leander, archbishop of Seville. The brown coloured statue made of Oriental wood was venerated in Seville for over hundred years and was then buried in a cave around A. D. 711, when Saracens conquered Andalusia. This statue presented a typical link between East and West, between Rome and Spain and between two Pastors of the church, and when rediscovered by a peasant in the 14th century, gave rise to a number of miraculous stories like the revival back to life of a dead cow, and the restoration back to life of the son of the cowherd Gil Cordero who discovered the statue in the cave.

In 1531 a poor Mexican Indian catechumen Juan Diego had the vision of radiant lady on Tepeyac hill formerly dedicated to a pagan deity. She told him that she was the Mother of Christ and asked for a church to be built on the spot where she appeared. As proof of the apparition she caused her image to appear as if painted miraculously on the rough sackcloth of Juan's cloak. The church was built and the cloak of Juan Diego hangs over the alter in the basilica. This came to be known as Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico owing to the great similarity with the pilgrimage centre of Guadalupe in Spain. A number of other similar visions and pilgrimage centres mushroomed in the New World, obviously under the inspiration of the Franciscans-Augustinians and other religious orders that had moved to the new mission country.

All these visions and discoveries of images underline the basic non-rational Christian dogma of the resurrection, associating "death", "burial" and "restoration" of the image, Our Lady's compassion for the simple folk especially the sick and the suffering, the Virgin's involvement with domesticated animals like the lamb and the cow. In all these cases there is close assimilation with pre-Christian religions. The cult of the Virgin Mary was frequently syncretized with pre-Christian cults of the great goddess as protectress of animals. The similarity between Our Lady of Vailankanny near Madras and a Hindu goddess is too obvious to need any explanation.

Here all, the popular cult and pilgrimage provide an experiential base for building up a more solid and rational Christian faith. The fundamental church policy in this matter was stated by Pope St. Gregory the Great in his message to Bishop Augustine of Canterbury referring to the idolworship and pre-Christian customs of the English people: "The temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God". Similarly in the Mexican story Fray Martin who examined Juan Diego who reported seeing Virgin Mary at the site of the former temple of the Mexican goddess, states that he was not entirely certain whether Juan really saw and conversed with the Virgin Mary or with some other deity of his pagan past. But for him it did not really matter, for even if the Indians had in mind something that is not entirely Christian when they came to pay homage to the apparition, eventually all would become clear to them, and they would truly come to understand what the Virgin Mary stood for.

This benevolent and tolerant attitude to the non-Christian background and elements consciously or unconsciously involved in pilgrimage situations indicates an important theological fact in interreligious dialogue, summarised in Tertullian's famous phrase, "*anima naturaliter Christiana*"; human soul has a natural affinity to Christian faith. Though credal formulae and conceptual systems of religions may radically differ, the spontaneous human religious experience behind them has a certain commonality in all men. We can enter into serious dialogue with men of other faiths only by taking for granted their good faith and assuming that behind their different cults, ceremonies and religious expressions there may be an authentic experience of God, and that the different symbols and practices are only inadequate attempts to express the inexpressible.

iv. Modern Pilgrimages and the Communion of Saints

The apparitions, messages and pilgrimages of the post-industrial Europe have a marked difference from the medieval pilgrimages. The cults of regional and local pilgrimage saints and the demarcation of their specific territories, which presented critical points in the ecosystem and points of contact with the other world have been steadily on the decline for almost a century now. Mobility and mass media of communication have broken down barriers and the most modern means of communication are being used to bring people together in pilgrim centres.

Thus in 1830-31 Catherine Laboure a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul had a series of visions of the Virgin Mary, in which she was asked to have a medal made honoring the Immaculate Conception. With the permission of the archbishop of Paris the medal was made and it became very popular under the name of the Miraculous Medal. The recipient of these visions led a quiet and holy life until her death forty five years later and she was proclaimed a saint in 1947. Similarly Bernadette of Lourdes a sickly child of a very poor family saw the Virgin Mary near a natural cave on Friday, February 11, 1858. Two other children who had been sent to gather wood with her found her rapt in prayer, but laughed at her story. She saw the vision several times again and on February 25 she was asked to originate a spring which still runs; she heard the words "I am the Immaculate Conception" and was asked to plead for the building of a chapel at the site. In spite of great opposition from the part of the civil government crowds assembled in great numbers and great many miracles confirmed the authenticity of the visions. Later Bernadette became a sister of Notre Dame at Nevers, where she remained till her death. She was canonized in 1933. In 1917 during the First World War Our Lady appeared to three children at Fatima in Portugal and instructed them on the need for prayer and penance to expiate the sins of the world. Fatima became subsequently a great pilgrim centre.

These new apparitions and revelations have emphasized the universal reality of the church and especially the communion

of saints. Protestant writers considered the church as an aggregate of persons having a community of faith and a certain Christian sympathy, and rejected the intercession of saints including that of the Blessed Virgin as derogatory to the unique mediatorship of Christ. Catholic Christianity on the other hand has affirmed the active relationship between men on earth and the saints in heaven including the Blessed Virgin and the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Hence the prayer of the living naturally brings the response from heaven, even though it may be difficult to establish a cause-effect relationship between them. But pilgrimages often start when there is a popular agreement that at a certain spot supernatural intervention in human affairs has occurred. Miracles which exclude all purely natural explanations and point to divine intervention as the only reasonable source of the occurrence is the hallmark of the church from its very beginning. For declaring the holiness of saints and recognizing the credibility of visions and apparitions the church looks for miracles, which are as it were gaps and openings in the opaque screen dividing heaven and earth.

Another important theological aspect of modern apparitions and pilgrimages is the universal message they communicate. They are no longer mere centres of devotion, providing inspiration for individual piety. Though they do not add any new facts to the fullness of revelation in the incarnate Word of God, still, they apply the message of the Gospel to the concrete situation of today. The messages of Paray-le-Monial, Lourdes and Fatima sound very much like the preachings of John the Baptist and Christ and give serious warnings against the aberrations of the modern age. Bringing the Gospel into effective history, applying it to the concrete situation is also an integral part of divine revelation. The message of the Gospel which remained as mere theological abstractions is fleshed out with historical circumstances through a clearly perceived imagery, condemning the greed and hard-heartedness of the wealthy and the temptation for atheistic materialism facing the poor. All are called upon to repent and expiate their sins through penance and prayer. The deep impact these modern pilgrim centres are having on the moral life and attitudes of people is itself an eloquent testimony to their authenticity and relevance.

The socio-political impact of modern apparitions and pilgrimages is particularly evident in the shrine of Our Lady of

Czestochowa in Poland and the recently reported apparitions in Communist countries like Medjugorje in Yugoslavia and at an abandoned Jesuit chapel in the country side close to Beijing in China. The Black Madonna at Jasna Gora in Poland whose cult dates from 1382 A. D. and is, therefore observing its sixth centenary this year, is the symbol of Polish resistance to foreign domination. The fact that hundreds of thousands of people, both men and women should defy the Communist government and treck on foot on pilgrimage to the shrine shows the resurgence of the popular religious spirit in reaction to the relentless atheistic propaganda. The fact that Pope John Paul II who has publicly stated his desire to visit his native country on the occasion of the sixth centenary of Czestochowa, which the Communist government has asked not to do is itself a big question-mark to its being representative of the people.

In this political perspective the question whether an apparition really took place is not very important. In the case of the chinese village mentioned above some one had announced before hand that a special apparition would take place at the chapel on a certain date. The Communist government took every precaution to see that people would not go there. Nature also was not favourable since there was torrential rain. Still, a large crowd gathered at the place well ahead of the announced time and engaged in prayer. Actually no apparition took place. But spontaneously people lit candles and decorated every nook and corner of the chapel and spent hours there singing hymns and reciting prayers. It is reported that this pilgrimage has become an annual phenomenon. This is a clear message to the Marxist government that religion is too deep and dynamic a factor in human life to be suppressed by external force.

The June 1982 issue of the Catholic Digest (pp. 14-20) reports the investigation made by a priest who is also a well known university professor about the apparition of Our Lady to six young people, four girls and two boys aged between 10 and 17, on the hill of Podbrdo on Mount Krisevach near Merjugorje in Yugoslavia starting June 24, 1981. Hearing about the apparitions every afternoon large crowds gathered at the spot to pray and wait for Our Lady to appear to the six young people. The Communist government which has become aggressively anti-Catholic after the death of Tito, stepped in and forbade all religious gathering outside the church. Then the praying on the

hill moved down into the parish church. This made one of the priest say jokingly: "We have the best communist government in the world. They tell our people to go to the church". The pastor Fr. Josip Zovko and several other priests were arrested and condemned to several years in prison. The young people too were arrested, threatened and asked to recant their story and then released. But the spontaneous gathering of people for prayers goes on. The publicity for the apparitions came almost completely from the Communist attacks against them. There is no official reaction, yet, from the part of the church authorities, about the credibility of the apparitions. But "the six young people, to each of whom the Blessed Virgin allegedly appears and speaks everyday seem completely normal, even average". What is perhaps more important is the impact on the religious faith on the people. The people of the area were only nominally Christian with only 20% practising their religion. But since the apparitions began there is a radical change: "There were miracles reported: a blind man now sees, a paralyzed child now walks, many who were sick are now healed. Hundreds of conversions took place. Enemies were reconciled. But the greatest miracle was, and is, the religious awakening of the region around Merjugorje, the spirit of prayer and the fact that almost everyone fasts on bread and water "every Friday" (pp. 116-17).

The importance of such apparitions and pilgrimages in Communist countries is that they give visibility to the Church. The Communist effort is to drive the Church underground, to destroy its popular appeal. An underground church is the church of the elite, of the few who can afford it, and it can easily be discredited as the group of a few reactionaries. But the Marian pilgrimages make the church the religion of the masses, a mass movement for the total liberation of men.

In brief, pilgrimages remain the popular expression of religion. The established religious authority can have at best only a negative control over it. As a charismatic phenomenon it does not conform to ordinary rules and regulations, even though the spurious ones can be easily detected.

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Pilgrimage: a Study of the Biblical Experience

I. Introduction

Spontaneously, people of every culture look upon life of the individual as a "journey". In a further reflection, many will speak of the goal toward which they are moving, or rather, striving. This involves a sense of commitment to a purpose, discernment of means and orientation; all of these impose limitations and sacrifices on the individual.

Pilgrimage specifies that the journey has a sacred goal, somehow associated with the purpose of life. An individual may make a journey, but a pilgrim senses that he or she is part of a community. The pilgrim enacts an experience which signifies outwardly the sacred meaning of life, growth and transformation.

Scholars who have observed the practice of pilgrimage in several religions and cultures have discerned basic elements common to the experience. These are interpreted differently in both details and the theological vision achieved, but much can be learned from a reflection on the structure of life imposed upon the pilgrims and those whom they encounter.

In a study of the Muslim *hajj*, H. B. Partin notes four elements basic to the experience of pilgrimage.¹

1. *The Muslim Pilgrimage: Journey to the Center* (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1967). This outline of the four elements is based on William G. Johnson, "The pilgrimage motif in the Book of Hebrews" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978) p. 239-251 at p. 244. The wording is often my own; some of the points expressed are drawn from Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

1. There is a separation from home, which is marked by an appropriate ceremony to indicate movement from domicile and ordinary occupation. 2. The journey is to a sacred place; aimless wandering, even by religiously motivated people, does not constitute a pilgrimage. 3. The pilgrimage is made for a specific purpose, such as forgiveness of sins, purification for a special task etc. 4. The process involves hardship, with physical difficulties and religious trials making failure a real possibility. The rigors of the journey and the restrictions imposed by the participants are part of the process preparing for purification.

II. The Hebrews

a. The Patriarchs

The call experienced by Abram foreshadows the pilgrimage there which becomes so important in Israelite religion. Although the call by God is very personal, it involves an entire family. Although the goal is unknown, the challenge to separate from the past is evident. Separation "from your country and kindred and your father's house" (Gen. 12:1), includes a rejection of former ways of worship and living.² The command "Go... to the land that I will show you" indicates that God will be with Abram and his family in their journey. Later, in a covenant ceremony, God reveals himself with the challenge to imitate his perfection. "I am El Shadd; Walk before me and be perfect" (Gen. 17:1). Adult life of responsible service implies growth and progress, expressed as a journey.

After Jacob's dream, he acknowledged the sacred nature of the place, which he called Bethel ("House of God"), and prayed for safety (an aspect of *shalom*, peace) on his journey, with the pledge of tithe on his return (Gen. 28:18–22).

2. This is clear from the covenant ceremony at Shechem where Joshua is reported to have commanded: "Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord" (24:14f.). The pre-Christian book of Jubilees, which retells Genesis, teaches that when Abram was fourteen, "he separated himself from his father, that he might not worship idols with him" (11:16). See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) p. 15–27.

Jacob and his family made the first pilgrimage recorded in the Bible when they followed the divine command to go to Bethel (Gen. 35:1). Jacob knew that this demanded conversion, so he exhorted all to put aside idols and to purify themselves (35:2). Changing garments is a symbol of inner transformation. This rejection of the past prepares them for the task of building an altar when they reached Bethel. God preserved them from the attack of enemies (35:5) and Jacob consecrated an altar, after which God changed his name (sign of a new destiny) and revealed his plan to him again (35:6-15).³ This became a traditional practice (Judges 20:18; 21:2, 19).

b. Israel in the Wilderness

The biblical sources portray a forty year period between the Exodus from Egypt and the entry into the promised land as a time of transition wherein Israel moves from the status of a large clan to nationhood. The revelation of God at Mount Sinai lays the foundation for Israel's realization that it is his very own possession and people (Exodus 19:4-6). This election is oriented toward the gift of the land where they will be free to serve God.⁴ The Covenant is a divine grace to which their

3. Concerning Jacob's command: "Arise, go up to Bethel (31:1), G. von Rad comments that the verb 'alāh often means "to go on a pilgrimage (1 Sam. 1:3; Psalm 122:4, etc.). "A pilgrimage is a cultic observance, and the participants must therefore free themselves as in every other cultic celebration of everything which is displeasing to God. This 'renunciation' is followed by an act of purification, i.e., ritual washing and probably also the beginning of sexual asceticism. Changing clothes is in religion a widespread cultic, symbolical act by which man represents himself as renewed by the divinity." *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972 revised) p. 336. For a taboo interpretation, see W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (New York: Schocken, 1972) p. 481-485.

Jubilees returns to the themes of Jacob's title and hope for peace (see Gen. 28:21f.) and describes the choice and consecration of Levi as priest at Bethel, where Jacob fulfills his vow (Jub. 31:26-32:15).

4. Israel is henceforth '*am YHWH*, God's people as community in relationship to him; *gwy* is used when there is a link with the land. See A. Cody, When is the chosen people called a *goy?*" *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964) p. 1-6.

response is shown by faithful obedience to the commandments (Exodus 20:1-23:33).

Although this journey was unique in the history of Israel, it possesses features which may be assessed in the framework of religious rites of passage and pilgrimage.⁵

The anthropologist Victor Turner develops his approach to pilgrimage from a comparison with rites of passage for an individual. He discerns three stages: 1. Separation from society for a period of time. 2. A transition period wherein the people being initiated experience community life without the structures of the average society. 3. Re-entry into the community and the exercise of a new role or function within the structures of the society.⁶

Israel departed from Egypt as a group of renegade slaves, joined by others who seemed to be dissatisfied with life there. They are forged into one as God's people at Sinai. There are temptations to return to the security of the enslaved existence from which they were fleeing, and the people had to learn trust in God and in his chosen leaders. Facing hunger, thirst and dangers, they were able to appreciate the gift of the land to which they were moving, but first they had to grasp that their life depended directly on God. Ways of ordering the society that they entered gave each person a sense of authority and inter-dependence. Thus, Miriam and Aaron learned to respect the unique place of Moses (Numbers 12:1-15). One could survive in the desert only if one belonged to a group, and each person had to co-operate in fostering the good of the entire community.⁷ From servitude and its strictures, the people slowly developed their understanding that freedom is given for service of the one God. As the beginning of this movement to a place where Israel

5. See Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: our Biblical Studies* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1981) p. 7-24.

6. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

7. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

would be free to worship God, the Passover was a perpetual memorial feast for the people (Exod. 12:14), and became the first of three pilgrimage festivals.

c. The Monarchic Period

Ancient feasts according to the rhythms of an agrarian society were integrated into the commemoration of the Exodus-Sinai experiences and the gift of the land. As representatives of families, adult males are required to "appear before the Lord God" with gifts that symbolized their awareness of total dependence on God (Exod. 23:14-17; 34:22-23; see 1 Samuel 1:21; 2:19). In Deuteronomy, laws centralizing worship demanded that this visit be "at the place (God) will choose" (Deut. 16:16-18). At least from the reform of the good Judean king Josiah, the unique place of worship was Jerusalem.⁸

Thus the Hebrews of the monarchic period and the Jewish community after the exile developed the practice of three visits to Jerusalem annually for as many people as possible. Unfortunately, the bare bones of legislative texts do not allow us to enter into the spirit of the community at prayer and sacrificial worship. This is provided by the psalms which describe the sentiment of people visiting the Temple in Jerusalem.

The examination of conscience incorporated into Psalms 15 and 24 stresses the unity of a person's spiritual and moral life. As in the Decalogue, there is a close connection between one's duties towards God and responsibilities toward neighbour. The

8. The several major works on Israelite worship mention pilgrimage only in passing, but are excellent for the feasts. See Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), H.-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), F. Auerbach, "Die Feste in alten Israel", *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958) p. 14-18: 337-343; The Jewish encyclopediae have an excellent discussion of pilgrimage in various historical periods, as do Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) p. 289-316 and an issue of *SIDIC* (Rome) 14 (1981-#3), but none takes a phenomenological approach.

inner sentiments of the pilgrim entering the Temple are recorded in Psalm 84. The teachers of Israel made clear to all that the fullness of life is communion with the living God. While this is achieved in the inner life of prayer and manifested in obedience to the commandments of the Covenant, the liturgical experience of the community is the highest expression of union between God and his people.

Scholars offer several suggestions about the meaning of the title "a song of ascents" attached to Psalms 120–134.⁹ Whether *ma'ilot* refers to the idiom "to go up to Jerusalem" or not, the contents of these prayers often express yearning for God in the Temple. The individual's sentiments are intensely personal, but always related to community experience (see Ps. 121:3–4; 122:1–4, etc.). The worship of God in the Temple assures the people of forgiveness and healing, with *shalom* (peace) expressing the manifold gifts of God, who has chosen Jerusalem, the city of peace, as his dwelling place with Israel (see Ps. 122:6–8; 125:5; 128:6, etc.).¹⁰

The burden of sin and Israel's ardent faith in God's forgiveness are contrasted very effectively in Psalm 130. There are hints of a vigil (Ps. 130:5–6, see 134:1) in the picture of someone waiting for the manifestation of divine mercy at dawn.

The hyperbole of David's vow not to enter his house or rest until he had built the temple (Ps. 132:3–5) reminds us of the sentiment of pilgrims who had nowhere to lay their head (see Luke 9:58). The only true rest of the Israelite came when the person was in the security of God's presence on Zion.

9. See Mitchell Dahood *Psalms III* (Anchor Bible) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970, p. 194–195).

10. On Jerusalem, see H. Schultz in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. Colin Brown) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) volume 2, p. 324–330. Peace is discussed by H. Beck and C. Brown, p. 776–783. Bibliographical indications complete each article. For a popular discussion of some pertinent themes, see my article "Jerusalem: City of God and of his People", *The Bible Today* 97 (October 1978) p. 1670–76.

Victor Turner stresses that the formation of a community spirit is essential among both initiands and pilgrims.¹¹ This sense of sharing a common life is expressed eloquently in Psalm 133. The first point of comparison is a liturgical experience, the consecration of Aaron to the high priesthood (see Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8). As priest, he mediated the divine gift of life to the worshipping community. The image of abundant dew, a heavenly gift of the natural order which sustains plant life in the long hot summer is a common symbol of the resurrection in Jewish tradition (see Hosea 6:1-4).

"The blessing of life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3) comes from God's gracious manifestation of his presence to Israel. This is the theme of the blessing of Aaron (Numbers 6:22-27), culminating with the gift of *shalom*. The liturgical use of this prayer in the Second Temple period is described in detail in the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (50:17-21) and in the second column of the Qumran Serek HaYahad ("Community Rule" or "Manual of Discipline").

d. The Passover under King Hezekiah (715-687 B. C.)

The Chronicler tells of good King Hezekiah's restoration work on the Temple (2 Chr. 29:1-36) and then offers a detailed account of his effort to convoke a large assembly to keep the Passover (30:1-27). The remnants from the fallen Northern Kingdom were invited to repent and return to the God of patriarchs (30:6-9). This would benefit even those taken into exile, indicating a sense of community solidarity under divine mercy. In answer to Hezekiah's prayer, the participants in the liturgy experienced healing (30:10-20) and kept the feast with great joy (30:26). The blessing of Aaron was an efficacious sign that God's presence and peace would continue to strengthen the people in their resolution to serve him alone (30:27;31:1).

Because this account is not paralleled in 2 Kings, scholars question the historicity of certain details.¹² The writer may have

11. See *The Ritual Process and Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*

12. See Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles* (Anchor Bible) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) p. 176-179.

described the event in terms of his own experience, so this text provides a valuable insight into the ideals and practices of the Second Temple period. Additional details, especially on tithing at the occasion of pilgrimage, are given in Tobit 1:3-6.

III. The Time of Jesus

The Infancy Narrative of Luke ends with the account of a Passover pilgrimage (2:41-52). Jesus' age is significant because he has almost reached the age of responsibility regarding the positive commands of the Torah. He challenges Mary and Joseph to realise that all relationships must be subordinate to the total dedication owed to the heavenly Father. This is expressed in the Temple with its sacrificial symbols.

Luke ends this section of the Gospel with allusions to Jerusalem, Passover, separation and reunion on the third day, pointing the Christian reader to the climax of the Gospel. He places the third temptation in Jerusalem (4:1-13, contrast Matthew 4:1-11) and with great solemnity describes how Jesus faces his coming confrontation with opposing forces. "When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). This begins the section which scholars call "The Great Journey". It is seen by Luke as a pilgrimage, with an ever-increasing group joining Jesus as he moves toward the Temple and the cross.

We can review the four elements of pilgrimage in relation to the Gospel accounts and find that the motif is strong at many points.¹³

1. Mary first learns the necessity of separation as Jesus approaches adulthood (Luke 2:48-49). The demands of Jesus on his disciples may be related to the same demand for a break with the duties and joys of family life and work. The pilgrim withdraws from the rhythms of his employment on the land or in the city. He abstains from the sexual relationship, just as the community arriving at Mount Sinai did (Exodus 19:15).

13. I owe several insights in this section to my colleague, Dr. Asher Finkel. The formulation of the section is my own.

Thus Jesus calls for celibacy in the service of the Kingdom, and a withdrawal from ordinary daily activities to become one with him as "learners".

2. The goal of the journey is specific – the holy city of Jerusalem, where God reveals himself to his people.

3. The purpose of the pilgrimage is to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom, i. e., the manifestation of God's majestic power and goodness in bringing healing and order into human life. The forgiveness of sins is the necessary preparation for the gift of new life.

4. In ancient times, any journey involved serious risks (see 2 Corinthians 12:23–28), but the pilgrim often also faced a religious hostility (Luke 9:52–56).

The mission sermon of Jesus (Matt. 10:1–12; Mark 6:7–12; Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–16) contains a number of elements which are best explained with reference to the pilgrimage.

The pilgrim was dependent upon hospitality along the way. He offered the greeting of peace and people would understand that they should respond to his needs for food and lodging. In turn, he would be a vehicle for God's blessing to come upon them. He was not to chat idly with people he met along the way, but foster a spirit of prayer (Luke 10:4).

The seemingly strange command not to go among the Gentiles or enter a Samaritan town (Matthew 10:5) becomes clear when one notes that the mission is described in terms of a pilgrimage. Gifts are to be exchanged in a context of common faith, so the apostles are told to seek out "the sheep of the house of Israel". It has been said that this mission "suggests symbolically the gathering together of the twelve tribes at the Eschaton".¹⁴

The prophets envisioned also the coming of the nations in pilgrimage to worship the one God in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–4).

14. Morna D. Hooker, "The prohibition of foreign missions (Mt. 10:5–6)" *Expository Times* 82 (1971) p. 361–365.

Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 14:16).¹⁵ Such themes were woven into the fabric of the Church's self-understanding as the Christian faith spread among Jews and later Gentiles.¹⁶ The community which proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom, the manifestation of God's presence and power in the work of Jesus and his followers, also emphasized that the goal of humanity is to be sought in a pilgrimage toward an even fuller life with God.¹⁷

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15. See H. Wildberger, "Die Volkerwallfahrt zum Zion (Jes. 2:1-5)" *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1957) p. 62-81.

16. See Ben F. Meyer, "The initial self-understanding of the Church" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965) p. 35-42.

17. See Johnsson's article on Hebrews in note 1.

Pilgrimage in Islam

The observance of Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca, 'Arafat and Mina in the month of Dhil-Hijj, according to the Muslim calendar, is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is an obligatory duty on every adult Muslim, male or female, once in a life time, if he or she is financially sound, physically fit and mentally sane. This pilgrimage has been the greatest factor in preserving the religious and cultural solidarity of the Muslims spread all over the world. The obligation to perform this rather difficult but pleasant and sacred duty, which is certainly an occasion to express and experience the unity of God and the oneness of Ummah (the Muslim community) accrues from the following Quranic injunction.

The first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Becca¹, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples; wherein are plain memorials (of Allah's guidance); the place where Abraham stood up to pray; and whosoever entereth it is safe. And pilgrimage to the house is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither...²

(Quran 3:96,97)

Mecca – The Holy City

Mecca is the holiest city for the Muslims all over the world, not because it is the cradle of Islam but on account of its close association with the religion of Abraham. What makes Mecca holy is the presence of the Holy Ka'bah, the prime focus of the Muslim world and the symbol of the permanent and immutable character of Islam. In the words of prophet Muhammad 'it is not man but God who had made Mecca Sacred'³.

1. Becca was the ancient name for Mecca.

2. All the Quranic references in this article are taken from Pickthall, M. M; The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, Mentor Book, New American Library, New York.

3. Ziauddin Sardar : (ed.), Hajj Studies, Vol. I Crom, Helm, London, p. 30.

It is traditionally believed that after his expulsion with his wife Eve, from Paradise, Adam built a small temple for worship, after the model of the temple in Paradise in which they used to pray. The progeny of Adam continued to visit this temple until it was destroyed in the Great Deluge. But later it was rebuilt on the same site by prophets Abraham and his son Ismail when they became victorious in the supreme trial in which Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son Ismail. Thus this is the first House of worship built on earth (Quran, 3:96). The Holy Quran gives a lot of information about this sacred sanctuary.

When his Lord tried Abraham with (His) commands, and he fulfilled them, He said: Lo! I have appointed thee a leader for mankind... We made the House (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). And we imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael (saying): Purify My House for those who go around and those who meditate therein... And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord accept from us (this duty)... Make this a region of security... (2:124-127).

This pre-historic tiny temple might have undergone several remouldings. Today the Holy Ka'bah stands in massive serene beauty: a simple cube-like edifice of stone and mortar veiled in blue-black cloth which is lettered in gold. Twelve meters in length, ten meters wide, fifteen meters high, the Holy Ka'bah is in a great mosque courtyard which may be entered through any one of its twentyfour gates.⁵ It has only one door in the eastern wall about seven feet above the ground. The Ka'bah is covered with a shroud (kiswa) of green brocade with a black band. During the Hajj season it is covered with a costly white cloth with decoration and embroidery, annually

4. Ahmad Kamal: *The Sacred Journey*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961, p. 3.

5. Ibid.

made in Egypt. The most important part of the Ka'bah is the blackstone inserted in the south-eastern corner five feet above the ground. This stone is traditionally believed to have been brought by Adam as a keepsake from Paradise when he and his wife were expelled from there after their fall. This stone was split into three big and several small pieces probably during a fire and so now these are held together by mortar and a silver band.⁶ Around the Ka'bah runs a pavement, the place for circumambulation. A few yards from the eastern-corner is the sacred Zam-zam well – which is also traditionally believed to have miraculously sprung up as a fountain when Hagar was making a frantic search for water when the boy was about to die of thirst. Thus this sacred sanctuary of Ka'bah is very intimately connected with the two most venerable prophets of Islam – Abraham and Ismail. Their ennobling example of surrender to the one God even today continues to inspire the millions of pilgrims who visit this holy land.

Institution of Hajj

God is omnipresent. But his presence is more deeply and richly experienced in certain places and objects. Special veneration for these places and objects might have led to over enthusiasm and idolatrous practices in the popular mind. Still the fact remains that the people all over the world find it meaningful and inspiring to visit such holy places. That is why pilgrimage is sanctioned in all religions. In the pre-Islamic Arabia there were several places of pilgrimage, but Mecca because of its religious significance was the most important pilgrim centre. After the annual fair (Ukāz) the Arabs used to visit the Ka'bah and perform certain rituals. At the time of Prophet Muhammad (570–632 A. D.) this hajj ceremony has been so completely assimilated into Arabian paganism that it lost its original monotheistic message. Ka'bah built for the worship of the one God had become a den of idols. The Arabs had introduced certain undignified and discriminatory practices in the hajj. The people belonging to the tribe of Quarish were the guardians of Ka'bah, but they made use of this high office only for their own benefits and interests.

6. Hitti P. K., *The History of the Arabs*, p. 131.

It is difficult to ascertain what was Muhammad's attitude towards this ancient hajj ceremony.⁷ As a pious man a Hanif, belonging to the monotheistic religion of Abraham, he would have been certainly unhappy about the idolatrous practices flourished in and around the Ka'bah. After his call to prophethood he paid little attention to it. His interest in the hajj was first aroused when he was in Madina. A. J. Wensinck gives the following reasons for this:

The brilliant success of the battle of Badr had aroused in him thoughts of a conquest of Mecca. The preparation for such an enterprise would naturally be more successful if the secular as well as the religious interests of his companions were aroused... To this period belongs the origin of the doctrine of the religion of Abraham, the archetype of Judaism and Islam. The Ka'bah gradually advanced into the centre of his religious worship.⁸

As a shrewd prophet politician, to arouse the religious feelings of the newly formed community, he made Ka'bah the "Qibla" (prayer direction). Till then the Muslims, like the Jews, also turned their faces to Jerusalem at the time of their prayer. Since Muhammad's relationship with the Jews became strained, he changed the erstwhile prayer direction in accordance with the following revelation:

The foolish of the people will say: What hath turned them from the *qiblah* which they formerly observed... And now verily we shall make thee turn in prayer, toward a *qiblah* which is dear to thee. So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship, and ye (O Muslims), wheresover ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it (2:142, 144).

Finally he proclaimed that the hajj is a sacred duty which mankind owes to Allah:

Pilgrimage to the House (of God, i. e., Ka'bah) is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither (3:97).

7. Wensinck, A. J., Hdjdj – Article in the Encyclopedia of Islam, Leiden of Brill, Vol. p. 32.

8. Ibid., p. 34.

It is interesting to note that hajj was the last of the major obligations to be instituted by Muhammad. According to the most reliable sources it was made obligatory only in the 9th year and of 'Hijrah', after the conquest of Mecca. We cannot fail to appreciate the genius of Muhaminad, who had the practical wisdom of "Islamizing" an ancient religious practice, so enthusiastically observed by the people of Arabia, to suit to the religious and social aspirations of the newly formed community of believers. Thus Islam took hajj back to its pristine purity. The idols were destroyed and the holy places were purified for the worship of the One God. The tribe of Quranish was brought down to the level of others through the egalitarian principle of Islam.

Preparation for Hajj

Hajj is not a mere tour to the holy land of Islam, but an act of worship. Hence this sacred journey needs a lot of physical and spiritual preparation. First of all one who intends to do the hajj, has to make an *Istikhāra* (a sort of consultation with God on any subject followed by two *rakiah* (round of prayers). He has to prepare his will (*wasiyyat Nāma*) without being unjust to any one and entrust it with the executor. One should also make necessary arrangements for the maintenance of his family in his absence. Before starting the pilgrimage he should pay off the debts, if he has any. It would be prudent if he takes along with him some basic medicines and nourishing food stuffs in dried or condensed form. It is lawful for pilgrims to take with them merchandise and trade goods from whose legitimate profit they may defray the cost of the voyage from and to their homelands and the expenses of the hajj itself. But this is purely optional and always in the interest of the pilgrim.⁹ The pilgrims have to be grouped and organized under hajj guides called *Mutawwifin* from the start till the end. So it is better and advantageous for further details to contact such guides in the nearest Hajj Office found in every land.

9. Muhammad Ashraf: *A Guide to Hajj*, Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore (Pakistan), 1976, p. 12.

"Ihram" and Initial Ceremonies

The pilgrimage is a complex ritual. Before reaching the sacred land a pilgrim must accomplish the rites that make him fit for the sanctuary. The ceremony observed at entering *Ihrām* begins with the ritual ablutions. As if for prayer he takes a bath or performs the major ablutions (*ghusl*), shaves his beard, cuts his hair, pares his nails and anoints himself. If water is not available it is permissible to perform the *tayammum* i. e., ablation with clean dust or sand as a symbolic form of purification. Then he puts on the pilgrim's dress which consists of two unsewn white garments, viz, the *izār*, a cloth reaching from naval to knee and the *ridai*, a cloth thrown round the body, covering the left shoulder, back and chest, leaving the right arm free. This is believed to be the classic costume of Abraham. Men may not cover their heads during the hajj. He is permitted not to use shoes but only sandals. Female pilgrims may keep to their customary dress, garbing themselves in plain fresh clothing at the time of entering into *ihrām*. Though the ladies are not to veil their faces, their hair is to be covered during the hajj. Their garments should reach to their ankles and the sleeves to their wrist and the neckline should be high. All high born and humble wear identified robes and are reminded that in the eyes of God all are equal.¹⁰

There are fixed places for the people coming to Mecca from different directions to change their clothes and to enter into *ihrām*. Natives of Mecca may enter *ihrām* in Mecca itself. It is not obligatory that the change be made exactly at these places, but it is preferred. The change of clothes should bring about a change of attitude. Ahamad Kamal explains the significance of *ihrām* as follows:

Ihrām is a state of many sacred prohibitions. On taking this gash the pilgrim enters into a period of peace and self denial. Violence in any form is banned. The pilgrim must abstain from luxuries and gratification of the senses, however legitimate, until the rites of the pilgrimage have been observed and *ihrām* put aside... It is forbidden for a pilgrim

10. Ibid., p. 20.

in *ihrām* to uproot any growing thing or to cut down a tree within the sanctuary of Mecca. During the days in *ihrām*, there may be no wrangling or argument, no rudeness, no enjoyment of sex, not even its discussion and no hunting. Bodily, the pilgrim is to be devoted to the acts of pilgrimage, intellectually, he or she is to be concerned with prayer, aspirations, praise of God and self-examination.¹¹

Immediately after the change of garments, the pilgrim is required to say the formal prayer of two *rakāh*, with a short prayer of supplication. Then he has to make a declaration of his intention to make *umrah* (visit to the Ka'bah only), or *hajj* (greater pilgrimage to the valley of Arafat) or *tamattu* (the performance of *Umrab* and *hajj* together).

O! God I intend to make *umrah*, or *hajj* or *tamattu*, and I am taking *ihrām* for it. Make easy for me and receive it from me.

Soon after the declaration of intent each pilgrim should say the following *talbiyah* (the call or acknowledging prayer) which is the most frequently uttered of all the formula prayers of the pilgrimage:

What is Thy Command? I am here, O God,
for *hajj* (or *umrah* or *tamattu*).
What is Thy Command? I am here O God!
What is Thy Command? I am here.
What is Thy Command? I am here!
Thou art without partner!
What is Thy Command? I am here!
Praise and Blessings are thine, and the
Kingdom (of heaven and earth!)
Thou art without partner!

The pilgrim should repeat this formula as many times as possible especially whenever he travels, ascends, descends: hears another pilgrim uttering these words, before and after sleep and before addressing any one.

11. Ahmad Kamal, Op.Cit., p. 14; also Quran 5:97–100.

The principal landing place in the Hejaz for pilgrims is the city of Jeddah, which has no religious significance to Muslims except the fact that it is the seaport-gateway to Mecca. Pilgrims are transported from Jeddah to Mecca nowadays by fast running motor vehicles. Some Muslims prefer to travel this distance by camel as this was the means of transport at the time of Muhammad. The pilgrims as they near the holy city are excited and cry aloud the *talbiyah*. They are stopped at three places by Arab police for security checkup. Al-Shemsi, the third halt is the point beyond which no non-Muslim is permitted to proceed. The following guard station is at Um al-Dud, seven kilometers before Mecca. The last halt is at the gates of Mecca. As they enter Mecca and the pilgrims should recite the following prayer.

O! God, this Sanctuary is Thy Sacred Place
 And this city is Thy city
 And this slave is Thy slave
 I come with many sins.
 From a far land,
 And I petition with the petition
 Of those who are compelled,
 And fearful of Thy punishment.
 And I beseech Thee to forgive me,
 And accept me with the complete forgiveness
 And admit me into Thy spacious Heavens...

Umrah (The Lesser Pilgrimage)

The pilgrims experience a profound emotional and spiritual delight as they enter the courtyard of Ka'bah. When he is ready to begin the *Tawāf* (the ceremony around the Ka'bah) he should go to a point opposite to the Blackstone and say:

O God! I desire to perform *tawaf* around
 Thy House, the Holy. Make it easy for me,
 and receive from me, the seven circuits.

Traditionally *tawāf* is begun by touching or kissing the black stone. But if the press of pilgrims is too great it is enough from a short distance to make a gesture of simulated touching and to pass the hand over the face with a short prayer. Then guided by the pilgrim guide go seven times around the

Kabah. During each of the seven circuits, the guide will read out a prayer which his followers are supposed to repeat. If a pilgrim cannot follow the words of the guide correctly because of the around or due to any other reason he may recite his own prayer in any language. When he completes the seven circuits he should go to the wall of the Ka'bah and press it with his palms; and if there is no standing place beside the wall he may face it from a short distance and with raised hands he must repeat the prayer read out to him.

O God... Thou art my Master in this world and in the Hereafter... Make our affairs to prosper, lighten our breasts, illuminate our hearts, and place the seal of virtue on our every action. O God, make us to die as Muslims, and make us to join with those who are virtuous, without affliction, and not with those who are tempted.

At the end of this prayer they must perform a prayer of two *rakāh* and then say whatever prayer or praise, formal or spontaneous that comes to their lips.

After these prayers the pilgrims move towards the Zamzam well and drink of its water. Then they perform the rite of *Sa'y*. This rite is to commemorate the running of Hagar in search of water for her dying son Ismail. So every pilgrim now traverses the track in increasing and slowing paces like Hagar seven times (four times going and three times returning) between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah. With this last rite the Umrah pilgrimage is over and the pilgrims who do not intend to make the greater Hajj desanctify themselves by changing the *ihrām* and taking a shave. Those wishing to make the hajj, remains in Mecca in the state of consecration.

Hajj (Greater Pilgrimage)

Pilgrims who would like to perform the hajj as Muhammad did on his Farewell pilgrimage must leave Mecca on the 8th of Dhil Hijj for Mina about four miles away from Mecca, before the sun passes its meridian. During the journey the *talbiyah*

prayer should be repeated often. In imitation of the Prophet the pilgrims spend their night at Mina and proceed to the Mount 'Arafat about eight miles further on the 9th morning. During their journey they recite the following prayer.

O God, to Thee I turn, praying to approach Thy Noble Countenance; make my sins to be forgiven, and my Hajj acceptable, and have mercy on me, and do not disappoint me, for Thou hast Power over all things.

After the ritual bath, the pilgrims enter the mosque or approach it as near as possible and then following the *imām* perform the prayers of Zuhr and Asr - two rakāh each. Then reciting the *talbiyah*, they move towards the mountain 'Arafāt, in the heart of a broad barren valley. This is traditionally believed to be the spot where Adam and Eve met each other after two centuries of separation immediately after they were expelled from Paradise.¹³

All pilgrims must be in the valley of 'Arafat by noon on the ninth day of Dhil-Hijj, when the sun passes its meridian the ritual of Standing, *waquf*, begins. Between 12 noon and the sunset the pilgrims must be standing before the Lord in the plain of 'Arafat. This is the Hajj, the ceremony of ceremonies, to be performed during the pilgrimage. This is the most essential part of the pilgrimage, for if one misses even a part of it his pilgrimage is invalid. What is this rite? It is the time for recollection of God for the whole day, repentance over one's past sins, a cry of anguish and a solemn promise to lead a virtuous life in future. This is the day of true Brotherhood devotion and repentance... All those who participate in this ceremony will be forgiven their past sins for it is believed that during these hours at 'Arafat God will send down His forgiveness and mercy to all those who are deserving. Most of the time is occupied in Khutbah (orations or sermons) being read out by the chief Qadi from a platform. There are formal prayers too which have been prepared for this time, but the

13. Muhammad Ashraf, OP. Cit., p. 67.

pilgrims are free to say their own prayers for their spiritual and material needs. This is the time when the pilgrims pray for their near and dear ones.

After the sunset all leave this sacred mountain for Muzdalifah at a distance of six miles and pitch their tents there. The pilgrims collect forty-nine pebbles to take to Mina for *Jamrāt* - the ritual stoning of the three pillars which symbolize satan and temptation. On the tenth day morning they go to pray at al-Mash 'ar-al-Harām, a place where Muhammad offered prayers during his final pilgrimage. Then they proceed to Mina. Here are the stone-and-mortar monuments marking the places where satan tempted Ismail to run away from the scene of sacrifice. But Ismail overcame the temptation, by throwing stones at him. In imitation of Ismail the pilgrims at the place of Jamrat al-'Aqabah coming within the range of the monument must cast seven of the forty-nine pebbles gathered at Muzdalifah saying "In the name of God, God is most Great".

The tenth day of Dhil-Hijj is the day of the "Feast of the Sacrifice" (*U'l-Adha*). So the pilgrims either individually or in a group sacrifice an animal, a camel or a cow or a goat, preferably at a place as close as possible to the Jamarat al-'Aqbāh, where Abraham is supposed to have made preparations to sacrifice Ismail. Part of the flesh is eaten by the pilgrims themselves, another portion of it is dried up in the sun to be taken home and the rest is distributed among the poor.

With this sacrifice the hajj proper is over and now onwards those who have made the hajj are called "Hajis". The hajis now embrace and greet each other, share their bread and put on their ordinary dress. The hair of women is only trimmed. Now they go to Mecca to perform again the *tawaf* and return to Mina. On each of the next two days in Mina the hajis visit the monuments (of satan) and throw seven stones at each of the three pillars.

No other ritual remains and so the hajis are free to pay social visits and to make friendship with the Muslim brethren of different nations. A few hajis perform some additional and voluntary rites such as farewell circuits of the Ka'bah, drinking

and taking away of Zam-zam water. Some of them go to Medina to visit the tomb of Muhammad and a few even go to Jerusalem.

The hajis, having completed the strenuous sacred journey, return home, spiritually renewed as new born babes. This is also an occasion for rejoicing in their homes and villages or towns. Neighbours pay congratulatory calls on the safe return of their friends who offer them some small presents like rosary, dates, bottle of Zam-zam water etc. The hajis certainly consider their hajj experience as an unique and unforgettable religious event in their lives.

Few Reflections on Hajj

In Islam hajj is not a matter of option but an obligation (*fard*) for every Muslim once in a life time. It is difficult to find out the exact number of Muslims taking part in the hajj every year. However the statistics show that only a small number of Muslims, especially in the case of those in countries far from Mecca is able to perform the pilgrimage. An estimated number of one million-plus Muslims participate in the hajj ceremony of which 20,000 are from India alone. If there has been no governmental restriction the number would have been certainly much greater than this.

That it is extremely difficult to organize accommodation for more than one million pilgrims in such a small area, over such a concentrated period of time, is evident to all. The lack of proper sanitary conditions, exorbitant prices of things, conveyance for the pilgrims, law and order in the city, proper guidance etc. are some of the problems which the pilgrims face during the hajj. The Saudi Arabian Government tries its best to reduce these problems to the minimum and its efforts in this regard are definitely praise-worthy. Time has brought many changes to the city of Mecca and the surrounding holy areas. Yet the functions and rituals of hajj are unchanged, for their character is immutable. The pilgrims are to be spiritually and physically prepared for this supreme act of worship. The Hajj Research Centre, established in 1975, is directed towards investigating conditions which might help the pilgrims derive the fullest spiritual and material benefits for themselves and for the whole Muslim community.

Hajj is an important means for the spiritual renewal of the pilgrim because its aim is not to worship the walls and archways of Mecca but to strengthen his belief in the One God, Allah. The pilgrim is exhorted to undertake this journey to purify himself of all that could estrange him from God. The properly performed pilgrimage is rewarded by complete forgiveness of sins. But this forgiveness is not linked to any particular rite but to the Hajj as a whole.

The pilgrimage is a source of spiritual renewal for the Muslim community (Ummah) as such. It is an occasion to manifest to the world the diversity and international character of Islam. No other religious duty has done more to unite the Muslims than the hajj where equality and brotherhood of Islam is expressed, experienced and compellingly demonstrated. The ritual garment is the symbol of unity and solidarity. Sermons during the hajj constantly repeat that the pilgrimage is the annual congress of the Muslim world.

The social, cultural and economic effects of the pilgrimage on the Muslim community are of immense importance. The needs of the pilgrimage help to maintain an adequate net work of communication between the far flung Muslim lands. It gives rise to a rich literature of travels bringing information about distant places and a heightened awareness of belonging to a larger whole.

A close investigation of the religious and historic background of the institution of the hajj, reveals that it is intimately associated with Abraham and his son Ismail, who are the common prophets of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But it is strange that the non-Muslims are not permitted to approach the sacred sanctuary of Ka'bah and the other connected places. The Muslims may quote the following verse as the basis for this prohibition:

The idolaters only are unclean. So let them not come near the Inviolable place of worship after this their year. (9:28)

'Though this is not quite a satisfactory answer to the problem raised, this restriction has saved the sacred sanctuary from becoming an attractive tourist and commercial centre.

Finally, one may ask, why did Muhammad raise this pre-Islamic practice to the status of one of the five pillars of Islam? The ritualistic performance of it has certainly got some colouring of idolatrous practices, which is the most abhorrent sin in Islam. The second Caliph Umar is reported to have said that he would not have kissed the black-stone, had it not been kissed by the prophet Muhammad. Besides the political and economic motives behind it, we see the ingenuity of Muhammad in Islamising this ancient practice as a means of bringing together his people, in the name of the one God, Allah.

George Koovackal

Pilgrimage to Sabarimalai

It is easier for a *kanniswamy* (the first-time pilgrim) to write about the pilgrimage to Sabarimalai than for a professional pilgrim; for the former in all temerity presumes to know and understand more about the phenomenon than the truly professional. For the latter it is above all an act of faith, a matter of the heart, and not a subject of the head; for him it is an ineffable experience to be contemplated in silence and not to be pontificated about; he would repeat Wittgenstein's warning: "If you cannot speak about something, you must be silent about it". But, being an amateur, I am not bound by the laws of discreet silence; I am rather urged on by the dictates of an *apologia pro actu suo*.

This essay is an attempt to describe the cult and legend of Lord Ayyappan and explore some of their implications, historical and ecumenical. It will not touch on the inner core of the faith of the pilgrim which is something very personal and beyond analysis. Of course, devotion to Ayyappan is the heart and soul of the pilgrimage; it is exactly like the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes. Such devotion works miracles at Lourdes, on Sabarimalai, and all over the globe. No wonder that even atheists, sceptics, and agnostics go on pilgrimages; they probably realize what they are missing. Most believers in Kerala feel that they should go to Sabarimalai at least once in their life time to redeem a pledge, to realize a life-long desire, or to fulfill a sacred duty.

Preparations

Though the actual pilgrimage takes place during the months of December and January every year, tradition prescribes the following preparations for the spiritual success and physical safety of the pilgrims. However, it should be mentioned here that the emphasis today is on the spirit rather than on the letter of traditions.

Forty-one days before the day of the pilgrimage—about November 15 or Vrischikam 1 of the Malayalam Era—the prospective pilgrim goes to a temple near his house and declares his intention to make the pilgrimage before the gods, the priests, and the community by wearing the garland of Tulasi or Rudraksha beads (*maladharaṇ*) round his neck. Two purificatory baths—before sunrise and after sundown—are prescribed; twice should he recite prayers before the icon of the Lord by incensing it with camphor. He should not cut his hair or shave his face; he should wear black, blue, or ochre garments; he should abstain from eating meat and fish. Most importantly, the observance of purity requires that he abstain from all sex, in thought, word and deed. The insistence on purity means that no menstruating woman, over twelve and under fifty, is permitted to make the pilgrimage lest their “impurity” bring death and disaster on themselves and other pilgrims during their trek through jungles infested by elephants, tigers, bears, leopards, and poisonous snakes.

On the eve of the pilgrimage, during a special ceremony called *kettumurukku* (backpacking) held at home in a pandal made of banana trees and coconut leaves, the pilgrim prepares his headload (*irumuṭi*) which is a cotton bag with two compartments. The front part of the *irumuṭi* contains a coconut filled with pure melted butter from cow’s milk; it is the offering to the Lord. The rear part of the bag holds all the food—from salt to camphor, to use an expression from the Malayalam language—and the personal things, like sleeping bag and clothes, the pilgrim needs during his long journey, which used to take several days depending upon the distance and means of transportation.

Trekking

Traditionally, the whole pilgrimage is performed under the direction and leadership of the professionals (*periaswamis*) who have made eighteen or more pilgrimages to Sabarimalai. The rule used to be that the pilgrims make the whole trip on foot in a spirit of penance, which means that some fifty years ago only people from north and central Travancore went to Sabarimalai. These days there are trains, buses, and taxis avail-

able to take the pilgrims all the way up to River Pampa so that the average pilgrim can make his pilgrimage in just twenty-four to thirty-six hours. The pilgrimage I am describing in this article refers to pilgrimages performed in the twenties and thirties, which are still vivid in my memory.

On the appointed day, as soon as the pilgrim has the Knapsack (*irumuṭi*) on his head, he recites aloud the prayer *swamiyee saranam ayyappa* (Lord Ayyappan, you are my refuge) and leaves the house without casting a glance at his house or saying goodbye to his family. With his mind fixed only on Lord Ayyappan, he is on his way with the other ayyappans, repeatedly reciting ejaculatory prayers in answer to the promptings of the leader or leaders.

There are several routes to the Ayyappan Temple located on Sabarimalai of the High Ranges of the Western Ghats in Central Kerala, South India. The most important, the most difficult, the most popular, and the longest one is the route via Erumeli which lies about forty miles southeast of the town of Kottayam. The distance from Erumeli to the Temple (*sannidhanam*) is forty-five miles. During the pilgrimage season this sleepy town of four thousand swells into a bustling market town of a hundred thousand clad in black, blue, and ochre.

The pilgrims first worship at the small temple dedicated to the Muslim saint Vavar, the associate of Lord Ayyappan, who had once reportedly engaged in a battle with the Lord but later reconciled by accepting Ayyappan as Lord and Master—this Muslim Vavar is the real key in identifying the historical period in which Ayyappan lived; Muslims arrived in Kerala only in the ninth century; hence, Ayyappan could not have lived before the ninth century. Erumeli, according to tradition, was hallowed by the Lord who passed through the town on his campaign against the foreign invaders; the place got its name Erumeli from Mahishi the buffalo whom the Lord killed and whose body found its final resting place here. Also, here at the Temple of Kaṭutṭaswamy—I believe he is the Christian hero-priest, Kaṭamattathu Kathanar—another associate of Ayyappan, the neophyte pilgrims (*kanniswamis*) perform the wild dance of *petṭa tullal* to commemorate Lord Ayyappan's victory over Mahishi and over his other

foreign enemies. For this wild dance punctuated by the rhythmic beating of drums, *swami thintakathom*, *Ayyappa thintakathom*, the dancers smear their body with paint and carry a rod decorated with leaves and flowers on their shoulders. Perhaps this war-dance has been designed for developing a sense of democratic, casteless cameraderie and for instilling courage against wild animals in the hearts of the pilgrims, which virtues are necessary during the next few days of trekking through the wild jungles. After the dance is over, the faithful wash themselves clean in the nearby stream, put on fresh clothes, and worship at the Ayyappan Temple to seek his permission for making the sacred journey. It is noteworthy that Lord Ayyappan is worshipped here as a fierce hunter or warrior and not as the serene teacher and gracious Lord, in which aspect he is worshipped at Sabarimalai.

The next day or the same afternoon, the pilgrims set out barefoot in groups through the jungle on the really difficult part of the trip. The first halt is at a ford called Perur Thodu, four miles from Erumeli. Many camp there for the night. Perur Thodu marks the boundary of the garden of the Lord or of the Kurukshetra of the Lord. From here the pilgrims have to walk six miles through bushes to reach the steep banks of River Azhutha.

After camping there for the night, the pilgrims get up early in the morning, say the usual prayers, and set out by calling out aloud the name of Lord Ayyappan, which loud chants are obviously designed to scare away wild animals. The climbing of Azhutha Mountain next is extremely arduous for the pilgrims from the plains. Once the descent of Azhutha is done, water awaits the pilgrims in the canal called *Karimala Thodu*, which is normally a dangerous place for humans simply because that is the only source of water for wild animals between Azhutha Mountain and Karimala.

Leaving the canal behind - some pilgrims rest there during the night - the men ascend the hill of Karimala. There is a saying: 'O Lord Ayyappa, Karimala is hard to climb' (*karimalakeettam kathidanamennayyappa*). According to folk traditions, the pilgrims

who have failed in the observance of ritual purity will be stalked and hunted down by tigers or elephants. It was on Karimala that Ayyappan's army commander Kaṭutha Swamy destroyed the forces of Udayanan and killed that Aryan king in a duel. On the summit of the hill there is a water fountain; after quenching their thirst, the pilgrims begin the perilous descent down the steep slopes of Karimala. The river Pampa, whose vision delights the hearts of the weary pilgrims, welcomes them at the bottom of Karimala; there all the pilgrims camp for the night; they have already walked about forty miles after leaving Erumeli three days ago. In the wide open spaces on the banks of Pampa, the men build make-shift shelters with bamboo reeds and leaves. The pilgrims bathe in the clear, cold waters of Pampa on whose shores Lord Ayyappan was discovered as a new-born baby by King Rajasekhara of Pantalam. During the ten days before *Makara Vilakku* or *Makara Sankranti* (the last day of the festival when the Lord's light shines brightly in the eastern horizon like a bone-fire), the Pampa shores turn into a veritable city of lights, especially on the eve of *Makara Vilakku*, which is *Pampa Vilakku* when pilgrims float toy boats on the river with lighted candles in them.

After crossing Pampa, which is not very wide or deep at this spot, the pilgrims climb the tallest, hill the slippery Mount Neeli, to reach Sabari Peetham where, according to much later traditions, Lady Sabari of *Ramayana* fame spent her last days and attained *nirvana* at the hands of Dharma Sasta—I think that Sabarimalai derives its name from the Sabaras or Saoras, a Munda tribe who are among the ancestors of the original settlers of Kerala. It is a level plateau on top; there one is shown Ponnapalamedu, the place where the rishis constructed the golden temple through *tapas* or powers of austerity to enshrine Lord Ayyappan who came there in his quest for leopard-milk. Thirty minutes' walk will take the pilgrims to Saramkuttialu, the area where King Rajasekhara decided to build the temple dedicated to Lord Ayyappan. In another ten minutes the pilgrims reach the holy temple itself.

The Temple

The temple is built on an elevation of about twenty feet. The pilgrim has to climb the Eighteen Sacred Steps *pathinettam*—

padi); the first-year pilgrim must break his coconut on the first step; the second-year pilgrim on the second step, and so on. After mounting the Eighteen Steps with the *irumuti* on the head, devoutly and prayerfully, the pilgrims go round the temple, worshipping at the shrines of Ganesh and Kartikeya, the other two sons of Shiva. And then they stand in front of the golden statue of Lord Ayyappan for a few moments to adore him and to make their wishes known to him. In this temple the Lord is seated on a golden throne in *kurmasan* without any weapons in his two hands; the left hand rests on the left knee and the right hand is raised in benediction (*chinmudra*); a silk sash is wrapped round both knees since the Lord is in a squatting posture; the crowned head wears long hair; the youth's very adult face radiates peace and serenity; round the neck there hangs a tiny bell along with all kinds of jewelry. After the *darshan*(vision) of the Lord, the devotees remove the headload (*irumuti*), and make the offering of the melted butter which is to be used for the anointing of the statue of the Lord (*abhisheka*). In thanksgiving the pilgrims offer gold, silver, and money for favours received from Lord Ayyappan.

The pilgrimage is complete only after the faithful worship also at Malikappuram, the temple of the Lord's virgin consort, and at the shrines of the Muslim Saint Vavar and Saint Katuthaswamy who guard the entrance to the temple as sentinels. After this the pilgrims descend the Eighteen Steps with their faces directed toward the Lord. Next, they go to the Brahmin priests to receive the sacrament of sweet *prasadam* which they take home, after consuming some, for friends and relatives. Immediately afterwards most of the pilgrims begin the return journey back to their homes; they walk back to the banks of Pampa. They eat their meals and board buses and cars to different destinations, as is the custom today.

There are different traditions about the meaning of the Sacred Eighteen Steps. The oldest tradition claims that Ayyappan, after his victory over his enemies, left all his eighteen weapons one on each step before he ascended to his throne in the temple, which explains why no weapons are displayed in the sanctuary or on the body of the Lord. One symbolical interpretation identifies the Eighteen Steps with the eighteen (6×3) circles

(chakras) of the *Kundalini yoga*; another view interprets the steps as eighteen obstacles that stand in the way of perfect union with the Brahman: some theologians argue that the steps represent the five senses (*indriyas*), the eight *ragas*, the three *gunās*, *avidya*, and *vidya*.

The Legend

In the ninth century of the Christian Era Rajasekhara ruled as king in Pantalam, Central Kerala. The king was childless, in spite of all prayers, pilgrimages, sacrifices, and austerities performed by the king and his subjects. One day the king went hunting on the banks of River Pampa, where he came upon an abandoned child. The king took the boy home and raised him as his own child. The boy was named *Manikantan* since he was found with a bell round his neck.

A few years after the arrival of Manikantan at the royal palace, the queen gave birth to a son. Naturally, the queen liked to see her son succeed to the throne after Rajasekhara's death, instead of Manikantan whom the king was grooming as his successor. The queen's desire – found an ally in the chief minister of the state who had his own designs for the royal throne; he was hoping to marry the queen on Rajasekhara's death and to become king himself. The queen and the chief minister conspired together to get Manikantan killed without arousing any suspicion on themselves.

When Manikantan was twelve years old – the Ayyappa statues represent a twelve-year old boy –, the king made preparations to consecrate his elder son Manikantan as *yuvaraja*, the heir apparent to the throne of Pantalam. The queen pretended that she was mortally sick, and the palace physician, at the suggestion of the chief minister, sent word to the king that only leopard-milk would cure the queen of her illness. The king decided that it was an impossible mission for any human to accomplish. But Manikantan thought otherwise, Manikantan went to the king and offered to go to the eastern jungles in his quest for leopard's milk. The king protested, but the young prince insisted. Finally, the king gave in. As the young man set out on his mission, he carried a coconut, sacred to the *trinetra* (the

three-eyed Lord Shiva), and other provisions in his *irumuti* which he carried on his head. Wherever he went, the wild animals submitted to his divine charm. He brought back home leopard's milk and cured the queen of her pretended malady and eventually succeeded to the throne of Pantalam. It was during his quest for the leopard's milk that he came to Sabarimalai, where *rishis* (seers) built the golden temple of Ponnampalamedu for him to dwell in. Obviously, this mission of the young man is to be seen as a task of conquering and civilizing the wild tribes of the eastern frontiers.

About this time Mahishi, the powerful buffalo demoness, started to harass the Aryan Indra and the *devas*. She invaded the kingdom of Indra and dethroned him—Brahmin commentators say that Mahishi is cousin to Mahishasura who was destroyed by goddess Chandika who is identified with Durga. No one born of the union of male and female could kill Mahishi; she had obtained this privilege of invulnerability from Lord Brahma through her austerities (*tapas*). Aware of her immortality and afraid of no human or divine agent of destruction, Mahishi gave herself to the mad pursuit of pleasure. Meanwhile the *devas* created a beautiful male buffalo by the name of Sundara Mahisha—he was Mahishi's husband Datta in a previous birth and Mahishi was then known by the name of Leela—and let him loose on earth, hoping that Mahishi would run after the male buffalo abandoning her abode in heaven. This she did. But she did not stop harassing the *devas*. The distressed *devas* then sought the aid of Shiva. The Lord felt compassion for the beleaguered *devas* and went to consult Vishnu; he expressed his desire to behold Vishnu again in the form of Mohini which Vishnu had assumed at the time of the *amritamanthan*; out of the union of these two male principles was born Dharma Sasta (Hariharasutan) who consented to be born as Manikantan on the shores of the river Pampa.

Twelve years after the arrival of Manikantan on earth, Mahishi returned to *devaloka* (the abode of the *devas*) and renewed her persecution of the *devas* with great vigor. Manikantan at this time was looking for Mahishi all over his kingdom. When he found out from his messengers that Mahishi was back in heaven, he ascended to heaven, in a hand-to-hand combat took

hold of her by her horns, and hurled her headlong to the earth below. This event is said to have taken place on January 13 or on the last day of the Malayalam month of Dhanu, on a Saturday when the star Uttara was in ascendance. After Mahishi had fallen dead at Erumeli, the Lord performed the dance of death over her fallen body. The dance of destruction became an act of creation: out of the dead body of the buffalo there emerged the beautiful Leela or the divine *Shakti* (the eternal feminine), and she begged Ayyappan to accept her as his wedded wife. The Lord replied: "In this *avatar* (incarnation) I am destined to be a *brahma-charji* (celibate), but you shall indeed be honored as my own *Shakti*, as my virgin-consort. Sit on my left as the Lady of the temple of Malikappuram". Leela persisted: "I would rather be a married woman than a virgin spouse". Ayyappan agreed to her suggestion conditionally: "If no *kanniswamy* (the first-time pilgrim) visits our temples during the Sabarimalai festival season—we shall know it if they have not left any arrows on the *saramkuttial* (the sacred pipal tree)—on the night of *Makarasankranti* I'll marry you".

Every year on *Makarasankranti* night the Lady of Malikappuram is taken to the Eighteenth Step on the back of a baby elephant for her wedding with the Lord. As the procession reaches the Eighteenth Step, a voice is heard: "Any *kanni ayyappans* around"? A priest responds: "Let us go and examine the sacred pipal tree". The procession moves on to the pipal tree. Alas! the tree is pierced with countless arrows. All lights go out. The disappointed Lady returns to her shrine without contracting or consummating her protracted marriage. The ritual seems to imply that Ayyappan declined his own marriage during his military campaigns and probably he died before his marriage; apparently he thought there was a time for war and a time for marriage. Unlike Lady Meenakshi of Madurai whose marriage is celebrated every year, the Lady of Malikappuram waits in longing for the day of her marriage with Ayyappan. It is appropriate to point out here that all the women pilgrims are called Malikappuram and to repeat that strict chastity is enjoined on all pilgrims during the pilgrimage.

Significance

I shall briefly dwell here only on the historical origins and the ecumenical significance of the cult and legend of Lord Ayyappan.

A. Historical Origins

Generally, anthropologists and historians admit that behind most cults and myths there are historical nuclei. As for the Ayyappan myths, it should be recognized that neither the cult of Ayyappan nor any reference to him is found even in the latest *puranas*, though later Brahmin myth-makers have associated him with Sasta; further, this cult has been until lately a local one limited to the land of the Cheras of Kerala. Though Brahmin priests are in charge of the administration and celebration of worship at the temple of Sabarimalai, they themselves do not take the name of Ayyappan. It is natural in every society for the priestly class to build a new theology around an existing hero-figure, apotheosize him, and elevate him to the larger pantheon made up of other gods and goddesses; monotheistic religions, like Christianity and Islam, canonize heroes as saints and write hagiographies about them. The legends associated with Ayyappan are the result of such legitimate mythopoeis found in all the religions of the world. These myths give meaning, measure, form, reason, and logic to cult lest religious rituals become anti-social and absurd.

Who is the historical Ayyappan? Some say he is the Buddha, for the Buddha is also known as Sasta and the prayer of *saranam* is Buddhistic and some icons of Ayyappan bear strong resemblances to the Buddha-statues. The popular Brahminical theology of the latter days present Ayyappan as the son of Shiva and Vishnu-Mohini; he is Dharma Sasta. Many anthropologists from Kerala think that Ayyappan is a tribal God of ancient Kerala; interestingly, not all the tribes of Kerala worship Ayyappan as Lord, especially in Northern Kerala.

The key to the identification of Ayyappan lies in the fact that the devotion to Ayyappan is a relatively modern cult even in South India. The *puranas* of the sixth and seventh centuries do not mention Ayyappan's name. There is no evidence that there

was an Ayyappan cult associated with Sabarimalai before the ninth century. But in the ninth century the name of Ayyan appears for the first time in the history of Kerala along with the name of Rajasekhara.

The period between 800 and 1000 is the Golden Age in the history of Kerala. It was the age of the Second Chera Empire of the Kulasekharas. The founder of this empire is Kulasekhara Alwar (800–820), the Vaishnavite saint who is celebrated as the author of the Tamil *Thirumozhi* and the Sanskrit *Mukundamala*. His successor Rajasekharavarman (821–841) is identified with the Saivite saint Cheraman Perumal Nayanar whose story is told in the Tamil *Periyapuranam*. This king who proclaimed the Malayalam Era of *Kollavarsham* is the darling of the myth-making imagination of the people of Kerala. The great Sankaracharya (788–820) was a contemporary of Rajasekhara. It was in the same ninth century that there lived the Chera King Ayyan Adigal Thiruvatigal of Venad, who gave the celebrated land-grant to the Christian church of Tarisa (c. 824) of Isodat Virai of Curakkeni Kollam. The Arab merchant Sulaiman visited Kerala during the reign of Ayyan Adigal. During the same period Kerala was attacked from the east by the Chola kings and Pandya kings. *Keralolpathi* (ch. 5) talks about the Pandya king's invasion of Kerala during the reign of Cheraman Peruinal (Rajasekhara) as well as about a military leader Udayavarman; the Ayyappa legends talk about Ayyappan's victory over a certain Udayanan. *Keralolpathi* provides us also with information on the presence and influence of Buddhism in Kerala, which is reflected in the Ayyappa cult. Further, according to Muslim traditions, the last Perumal became a Muslim, changed his name to Abdul Rahman Samiri, married the Muslim woman Rahabieth, and retired to Shahr on the Arabian coast. Therefore, King Ayyan of Venad lived during a period of military campaigns, under Buddhist and Muslim influences, and with a certain King Rajasekhara as his suzerain lord.

When we reflect upon the Ayyappa tradition against the historical background sketched above, it becomes clear that Lord Ayyappan is the apotheosis of Ayyan Adigal, the Chera king of Venad and his stepfather Rajasekhara of Pantalam is the

favorite Perumal of Kerala, Rajasekharavarman or Cheraman Perumal. King Ayyan apparently was successful in checking the inroads of the Chola and Pandya kings who staged their invasions from the east across the Western Ghats; oral traditions indeed refer to the martial victories of Ayyappan and his commander Katuthaswami; according to tradition, Ayyappan laid down his victorious arms on the Sacred Eighteen Steps. Further, Ayyappan, unlike the Hindu deity Sasta, is very human in form with just two hands carrying bows and arrows. In my reading of the Ayyappa tradition, Mahishi represents the Chola and Pandya forces of the east whom he defeated in the high ranges of the Western Ghats. There are seven battlefields on the pilgrimage route which commemorate the victorious campaigns of Ayyappan: Kottappurain, Kalaketti, Utumparamalai, Karimala, Sabaripeetham, Saramkuttial, and Thrippaty—evidently, the pilgrims have to enact the campaigns of Ayyan by touching base at these battle sites. Utumparamalai is also known as Inchipparakkotta, where the hero won a significant victory over his enemies; it is commemorated there by the temple dedicated to the Lord. At another place, Thalapparakkotta, the commander of Ayyappan's army, Kochukatutha, destroyed the army of Udayanan, obviously, an Aryan or Brahmin king. The association of Ayyappan with the Muslim Vavar and the Christian Katuthaswami indicates that Muslims and Christians fought side by side against the invaders of Venad. The conclusion is that Lord Ayyappan is the deified hero-king Ayyan Adikal of Venad. In him martial glory, virtuous life, benevolent kingship, and blameless leadership merged to form the great Lord Ayyappan, the local god-saint of Travancore.

B. Ecumenical

Ayyappan is, in theory and practice, the national hero of Travancore or Venad. As such, he is the king and lord of all the people of Travancore, irrespective of caste and creed; it is important to point out that no one caste has ever claimed Ayyappan as their own; members of all castes go on pilgrimage to Sabarimalai including Brahmins who serve as the priests of the Lord. Every pilgrim, whatever his caste or religion, is addressed as *swamy*, and no one has ever been reportedly barred from worshipping at the Sabarimalai Temple. Incidentally, the

present temple was built under the supervision of a Christian, Polachirrackal Kochumman.

All the major religions of Kerala are represented at the temple. Buddhism, once a prominent religion of Kerala, is represented in the theological view that Ayyappan is an *avatar* of the Buddha-Sasta and in the *saranam-prayer*. The Saivites have made Ayyappan the son of Lord Shiva and an *avatar* of Dharma Sasta. The Vaishnavites consider him the son of Vishnu. Theologically speaking, Brahminism has created a *purana* or biblical mythology for Ayyappan by incorporating him justifiably into Hindu mythology and Hindu pantheon. Ayyappan is also dear to the Muslims, because a Muslim leader, Vavar, was his associate and friend in life and probably in death as well; no wonder then that Vavar is worshipped alongside of Ayyappan at Erumeli and Sabarimalai. All this seems to leave out the Christians from the Ayyappa circle. There is an oral tradition which claims that Ayyappan is the brother of the popular Christian hero of Travancore, Kaṭamattathu Kathanar, whose various exploits are well known all over Travancore. In my opinion, Kochu Kaṭutha, the unidentified associate of Ayyappan, is Kaṭamattam. First, their names are similar; second, tradition calls Kaṭamattam Ayyappan's brother; third, the title *swamy* means "priest"; fourth, legends claim that Katamattam lived for a long time in the jungles; fifth, both Ayyappan (Bhootanathan) and Katamattam enjoyed magical powers over demons and wild animals. There is no historical reason to disclaim close collaboration between these two contemporary national heroes during a period of national emergency when the country was attacked from the east by the Cholas and the Pandyas. Besides, Christians have never stopped going to Sabarimalai as pilgrims.

Sabarimalai Temple, therefore, is sacred to all the people of Kerala, irrespective of religious affiliation and social standing. There Keralites honor the great hero-king of the nation Ayyan Adikal or Ayyapan as well as his close associates who are Muslim and Christian. The temple at Sabarimalai, indeed, is an ecumenical shrine.

Book Review Article

Jacob Kattackal, *Religion and Ethics in Advaita.**

Freiburg: Verlag Herber, 1980, pp. ix + 260.

Dr. Kattackal's book, *Religion and Ethics in Advaita*, is an extensive study of the Advaita system of thought in Indian philosophy. The work is quite topical, because, as the author points out, there is now a world-wide interest for oriental thought and way of life.

Although Kattackal's main concern is to examine and defend the place of religion and ethics in *Advaita*, he also tries to acquaint the reader with a wide horizon of Indian thought. His survey ranges over a wide field, from Gaudapāda, the grand guru of Sankara to Vivekānanda, from Upaniṣads to the writings of the neo-Vedantists. The work is divided into four parts: I. Praeambula, II. Sankarācārya's *Advaita*, III. Post-Sankara Philosophy, and IV. The New-Vedanta.

As we have mentioned, the objective of Kattackal's inquiry is to find out whether or not *Advaita*, the philosophy of non-dualism affords a rational basis for religion and ethics (cf. p. 63). This enquiry is shown to be relevant on two scores: First, "Advaita is now widely recognized as one of the most profound systems of human thought" (p. ix), and secondly, "a serious charge is often directed against the *Advaita* system that this system has no logical place or rational basis for Religion and Ethics" (p. 63). The conclusion the author arrives at after a detailed study of *Advaita* is that "the Advaitic concept of Religion and Ethics has a really rational place in the general setting of *Advaita-Vedānta*" (p. 243).

It is true that the problem is clearly stated and the conclusion is unmistakably drawn. But what goes in between, namely, the inquiry and its method and the way the conclusion is drawn is not without ambiguity. After dealing with every section of the advaitic thought, the author takes care to state something like this: "Thus we see there is the most rational ground for religio-ethical activities in *Sankara Advaita*" (p. 99) or 'And this offers ample scope for Religion and Ethics in *Advaita*' (p. 335). However, a critical reader remains unconvinced for more than one reason. Since this is the central issue of the book we would like to discuss it in some detail.

* An Indian edition of the book has also come out with additions of detailed word and subject indices and an appendix on Spinoza. Copies are available at St. Thomas Apo. Seminary, Vadavathoor, Kottayam, for Rs. 45.

i. Although the aim of the inquiry is clearly stated at the beginning, after reading the book one is less sure of what the author really intends to accomplish: whether it is to defend the Advaita system of thought against the serious charge that there is no rational basis for religion and ethics in it, or to defend religion and ethics by showing that they have a rightful place and proper recognition also in a great system like Advaita. Knowingly or unknowingly, both are done and this perhaps is a major draw back of the whole work. For if one wants to defend Advaita against the charge that there is no place in it for such sublime realities as religion and ethics, one should stand for Advaita and be critical about religion and ethics; if, on the contrary, one sets out to defend religion and ethics and their importance in human life, one cannot but be critical of the Advaita system of thought. The reason, as we shall see, is that Advaita and the "*usual meaning*" (p. u.) of religion and ethics do not go together. Now the fact is that neither the Advaita system of thought nor the "*usual meaning*" of religion and ethics is thoroughly evaluated in the book.

Any way, it becomes evident that the author's approach is defensive or, to use another term, apologetic regarding both the Advaita system of thought and the common understanding of religion and ethics. When one sets out for a serious research, certainly one has to begin with the available notions and views. But then there could be two different approaches depending on whether one is apologetic or frankly open to truth. If one is apologetic, there is little possibility of any change in the views and notions with which one has started the inquiry since one's concern is to defend them by all means. But if openness to truth is what matters, then, perhaps the inquiry may also affect (those) views or notions and could lead to their correction, enrichment or, in some instances also, their total rejection. Very little of this kind of dynamism is seen to be at work in Kattakal's method, especially with regard to the understanding of religion and ethics. He seems to defend also the Advaita system of thought as a whole, except perhaps the extreme views (cf. p. 4). The impression given is that there exist no problems concerning the world view of Advaita. In fact, those who are aware of the basic problems of philosophical thought are taken aback when they come across the ready conclusion: "Thus the *Weltanschauung* of Sankara does not present any difficulty; it only affords a rational basis for the practice of religion and ethics" (p. 82).

ii. Our contention is that without a critical evaluation both of Advaita and of religion and ethics, the author's conclusion rests on weak grounds.

The basic position of the Advaita philosophy is that reality is one or non-dual. *Brahman* is the name given to this unity of Being. Thus "this is that" (*Katha Up.* IV, 3), "That thou art" (*Chand. Up.* VI. x. 3), "I am *Brahman*" (*Br. Up.* 1. 4. 10) are the great sayings (*mahāvākyas*) of Advaita philosophy. But the advaita point of view is in open contradiction with our experience of plurality and change. The advaita way of dealing with this contradiction is to devalue the world of multiplicity and change by denying that it has anything to do with the true and ultimate way how reality is. In other words, the Advaitic position is that our perception of the world of multiplicity is the result of our ignorance (*avidya*), and that in the state of true knowledge (*Brahma-Jñāna*) the multiplicity would vanish and unity become the honest truth about reality. Thus, to escape from the dilemma of multiplicity in the face of unity what Advaita does is to distinguish between two levels of knowing and being: the level of *avidyā* (ignorance) and of *vidyā* (knowledge), and correspondingly the *vyavahāra* and the *paramārtha* level there is only unity. In the advaita system of thought, then, the truth about the human being is that he is identical with *Brahman*, the ultimate Unity. Only to those who are ignorant of this truth there is any distinction between *Brahman* and the human being or any other being. If this is the case, then there is no scope for any religion and ethics in the *Weltanschauung* of Advaita for if there is only *Brahman* ultimately for whom is religion and ethics? Kattakal is aware of this difficulty and proceeds to defend religion and ethics without really criticizing the one-sided emphasis of the advaita world view. He had then to accommodate religion and ethics with what is left over, namely, the *vyavahāra* level of being which is the level of *avidyā* or ignorance: "It is this separation and distinction on the plane of *vyavahāra* or *avidyā* that offer ample scope for religio-ethical activities for man" (p. 55; cf. also pp. 3, 12, 152, 235, 237).

But if it is *avidyā* (ignorance) that gives ample scope for religion and ethics, they could be dispensed with as a matter of ignorance, a charge against religion which is not new, and not altogether false. The author tackles this problem by pointing out that in Advaita the *vyavahāra* level of being is thought to be the result of *avidyā*, not in itself, but only in comparison with what is true, which does not make much sense. Hence this way of saving religion and ethics is ultimately futile. But there is more to it than this. I think that the actual tackling of the problem is attempted through another door. It is the author's understanding of the two levels—the *vyavahāra* and the *paramārtha*—as two levels of experience only (cf. p. 74). In the *paramārtha* level of experience one perceives unity which is the mystical experience, and in the *vyavahāra* level the vast majority of

the human beings experience multiplicity. But here again it does not work because the Advaita world view is not a matter of experience or epistemology ultimately, but an ontology for which the most important issue is what the real case with reality is. And the stand point of Advaita is that reality is non-dual irrespective of the fact whether there is any one to know it or not. If one grants this (the author seems to do that), then every attempt to re-instate ethics and religion is bound to be frustrated.

It is interesting to see how the author tries to secure a little room for religion and ethics in the world of *vyavñhāra* after granting without question the basic tenet of Advaita. To Sankara's explanation of Advaita philosophy through the analogy of the *mahākāśa-ghatākāśa* (universal ether-and pot-ether), the author comments that the main idea of this analogy "seems to be that the human soul in its deepest level is divine, and that it cannot exist separate from God" (p. 89-90; emphasis added). Almost the same comment is heard also in connection with Sankara's theory that the soul is a reflection (*pratibimba*) of God, like the reflection of sun in water. For Kattackal what Sankara means here "seems to be that God is the prototype or source (Urgrund) of the human soul which resembles God" (p. 90; emphasis added). Therefore according to Kattackal, "by means of all these analogies (pot-clay, gold-ornament, wave-ocean etc) Sankara is driving home to the readers the main idea that the world does not exist apart from *Brahman*" (p. 70). One wonders whether this is all that is affirmed by Advaita. The approach, however, is modified slightly when the human being is dealt with: 'In as much as the inner or deeper self in man is *Brahman* itself, man is *Brahman* itself, still, the lower self in man (the psycho-physical system) cannot be identified with *Brahman*; so under this aspect, man is different from *Brahman*" (p. 92). But here the author forgets that the Upaniṣads proclaim: "This is that", which is applicable to all that is real (hence also to the psycho-physical system) as well as "That thou art".

Another argument to save religion and ethics is based on the traditional relationship between *dharma* and *mokṣa* (cf. p. 244). It is pointed out that the Upaniṣads and the *Acāryās* (teachers) inculcate the practice of religion and ethics as a means to attain *vidyā*, the *paramārtha* point of view, or *mokṣa* (cf. p. 21, 28, 182). Here again the difficulties are legion. First of all, if religion and ethics are only the means to *vidyā* or *mokṣa*, they have only a provisional value, especially because of the fact that *mokṣa* is attained not after death but while fully alive. Secondly, it would follow that those who are in *vidyā* or *paramārtha* level are beyond religion and ethics (they are in fact considered to be so)

which would then mean that *in truth* or *in reality* religion and ethics are superfluous and that they are meant only for the ignorant and the unwise.

One would have certainly wished that the claim of the back-cover of the book that Kattackal's "carefully developed analysis is a fascinating and wholly original interpretation of the ethical import of mystical experience" were true. In fact, there is very little thought given to an ethics or religion based on the mystical experience. Instead, the author attempts to explain away the Hindu claim that those who have reached *Brahmajnāna* are above ethical obligations (cf. p. 24-25). It may be true that the Sanyasins who have reached *Brahma-jnāna* have no obligation to perform the Vedic rituals and ceremonies (cf. p. 109), but they should live an ethical life according to their enlightenment. One of the negative aspects of the Hindu world view is that it does not sufficiently attend to the practical implications of *Brahma-jnāna*. Here, sages like Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda are only exceptions not the general rule (cf. p. 228).

Hence the work as a whole lacks the awareness that perhaps there could be a *paramārtha* kind of religion and ethics based on the *paramārtha* state of reality and mystical experience. Then of course one has to change, correct, or even reject the all too ready notions of religion and ethics for which the author is apparently not prepared. In fact, the *paramārtha* state, the state of enlightenment, should be the basis of genuine religion and ethics, and the ultimate court of appeal in religious and ethical matters. If one would have thought of an ethics based on the mystical experience of unity, one could easily point out the inconsistency of Sankara and others who advocate that kind of religion and ethics which are sometimes cruelly discriminative and inhuman. What I have in mind is Sankara's insistence on following "the *varṇāśrama-dharma* in this world, even though, according to him, the caste distinctions do not exist in the next world," (p. 114; cf. also p. 45). True, Sankara proposes this for the *karma-yogins* but how is it that he could not see the inconsistency of holding the unity of everything (Advaita) and at the same time inculcating such a cruel and inhuman social system as the (same time in) caste system where a section of human beings is discriminated and kept apart as low castes and untouchables? From the *paramārtha* point of view there cannot be any such caste distinctions even in this world. It is incomprehensible how the author who deals explicitly with religion and ethics could not see this blatant discrepancy between theory and praxis in the advaitic traditions.

Worst still is the attitude of the author in the face of the inhumanity of the caste system. An example is the author's soothing comment on the total domination of the brahmins

which was unquestionably established through the caste system. *Manusmriti*, the most authoritative of the Hindu law books extols the superiority of the Brahmins:

Of all creatures the animate are said to be the best; of all animate beings men are the best; of all men, *Brahmins* are the best.... The very birth of a *Brahmin* is an eternal form of *dharma*; born for the sake of *dharma* he is conformed to becoming *Brahman*. When a *Brahmin* is born he is born superior to the whole earth, he is the lord of all creatures, and he has to guard the treasury of *dharma*. Everything that exists throughout the world is the private property of the *Brahmin*. By the high excellence of his birth he is entitled to everything. What he enjoys, what he wears, and what he gives away are his own private property, and it is through the mercy of the *Brahmin* that others enjoy (anything at all) (*Manusmriti* 1. 96-101; p. 45-46).

And Kattackal's comment to this is: This exaggerated excellence of the *Brahmin* may probably be an exhortation to *Brahmins* to live a holy life" (p. 46) !

iii. Now, the notion of religion which is employed in the book also needs some comment. The author employs the "usual meaning" of religion which he describes as "both a *mental attitude* (as the submissive attitude towards the Supreme Being) and *external manifestations* of that attitude through prayer, worship, meditation, rituals and so on" (p. 4). It is for this religion that Kattackal attempts to secure room in Advaita, not at its core, but some where on the periphery, without being really aware that man's religiosity and its expression can have different levels. Nothing is said about religion at the *paramārtha* level, where the heights of religiosity could exist without any submissive attitude to the Supreme Being, nor any worship or rituals. Also the author does not seem to be aware of the fact that the definition of religion adopted as the usual one is defective because it does not apply to all the existing religions. Buddhism for example, is a religion for which "the submissive attitude towards the Supreme Being" is not applicable.

There is also a slight discrepancy between the affirmation at the beginning with regard to 'religion' and 'ethics' "that it is in the usual sense that these terms are employed in this book" (p. 4) and the final conclusion that "the *Advaitic concept of Religion and Ethics* has a rational place in the general setting of *Advaita-Vedānta*" (p. 243; emphasis added). The jump from the "usual sense" to the "Advaitic concept" of religion and

ethics creates confusion and the author does not clarify what this advaitic concept of religion and ethics really is.

Similarly incomplete is also his description of mysticism. Mystic experience for Kattackal is the experience "through which man obtains a direct and immediate contact with the Supreme Being; through such contact man enjoys an experiential knowledge of the Ultimate Reality" (p. 5). The trouble with this definition is that it is applicable only to a theistic understanding of the matter, whereas there exists also non-theistic kind of mysticism which is taken into account by Zaehner in his description of mysticism. The author quotes Zaehner's description successively but fails to integrate his insight into his own definition.

iv. Another important point to be discussed seriously is the author's persistent attempt to make the experience of nonduality (Advaita) equivalent to 'intuitive vision' or 'beatific vision' of the Supreme Reality, and he seems to do this by repetition rather than by any sound argument. To pick up a few instances at random: "*Brahma-sāksātkāra* or intuitive vision of the Divine in man" (p. 75; cf. also p. 74). There are a number of other instances where "intuitive vision" appears in similar conjunctions (cf. pp. 109, 111, 120, 138, 141, 142, 233). The climax of this is found where the author equates the *paramārtha darśana* as "Supreme Bliss or Beatific Vision" (p.106). The unstated intention of the author may be to show that the Advaita experience is the same as the Christian "Beatific Vision". To serve his purpose Kattackal does not even hesitate to translate *jñāna* as 'vision' (pp.138, 142), *prajna* as "higher intuitive knowledge" (p.22; it is a verse 1.2.24 of *Katha. Up.* where Hume translates *prajna* as 'intelligence' and Deussen as search (inquiry)'). The author finds justification for this in the fact that *vidyā* and *sāksātkāra* have a common root with vision and hence "the very etymology of *Brahma-sāksātkāra* suggests the intuitive vision of Brahman" (p. 244, note 1).

It is surprising that a careful study of Advaita did not reveal that the etymological suggestion is ultimately misleading. In fact, the 'vision' of the Western philosophy and theology is different from the *jñāna sāksātkāra* of Indian thought for the reason that 'vision' maintains the subject-object distinction and duality where as *jñāna* and *sāksātkāra* overcome it. Moreover, the equating of *paramārtha-darśana* with 'beatific vision' is unwarranted also for the reason that according to the Christian theology 'beatific vision' is attained by the blessed in heaven after death, where as *paramārtha-darśana* is attained in this life.¹

1. In fact R. Panikkar too points to 'beatific vision' in association with *Brahma-jñāna*: "Sie (vedantische philosophie) wird nur danach streben, ihren Schülern die Gleichung ātman-

We shall conclude this review which has already become long enough. Our discussion of the work was not meant to devalue its importance or to minimize the achievement of the author, but to point to the complexity of the problems involved. One feels that a more critical approach would have made this work more significant and valuable. But as it is, the work is a mini-encyclopaedia of very useful informations on the Advaita system of thought. There is clarity and objectivity of presentation, especially because the author is well versed in Sanskrit, without the knowledge of which it is impossible to get into touch with the Indian mind at any deeper level.

Abraham Koothottil

Author's Response *

In the above review the central point has been missed, namely, the Advaitic concept of the two-level consciousness or the two different levels of experiences of man: the vyavahāra and the paramārtha experiences. The Reviewer seems to have started with the preconception that the vyavahāra and paramārtha are merely two points of views. The expressions such as 'paramārtha point of view', 'vyavahāra the result of ignorance' in their contexts reveal a misconception. I may invite the readers, if they have any doubt, to read my book, especially chapters one, six and seven.

As I pointed out above the whole Advaitic system hinges on the concept of the two-level consciousness of man: the vyavahāra-level and paramārtha-level. As Troy Organ, the American scholar warns: "Much of the confusion in the interpretation of Sankara has stemmed from forgetting that there is a twofold *vidyā*, viz. *para* *vidyā* and *aparāvidyā*. This lower point of view (vyavahāra or *aparā vidyā*) seems to be a false point of view, but the falsity is only a falsity when contrasted with the higher point of view (i.e. from the *pāramārthika*-point of view)" (quoted in '*Religion and Ethics in Advaita*', p. 235). The paramārtha-experience or transcendental experience is totally on a different plane from the vyavahāra-experience or normal day-

brahman beizubringen. Ist dies geschaut, nicht nur geglaubt, so ist das Heil da. Es ist die *visio beatifica*" (*Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum*, Freiburg Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1964, p.69). But it may be that he is referring only to the homeomorphic function of *Brahma-jnāna* and 'beatific vision', i.e., if *Brahma-jnāna* is the final goal in Hinduism, according to Christianity it is 'beatific vision', which, however, need not mean that they are the same.

* Response by the author is not allowed to the review of his book. But an exception may be made in the case of a longer review like the above (General Editor).

to-day experience. The paramārtha-experience is the state of mystic ecstasy or rapture; it is the plane of unity-experience or transcendental vision whereas the vyavahāra or the normal walking experience is at a lower level; it is the level of multiplicity and diversity.

An idea of this two-level consciousness or vision can be had from the following analogies: See, you can look at a tiny particle of dust with your naked eye; you can look at it through a powerful electroscope as well. The electroscope will reveal to you an object totally different from the one you saw with your naked eye: the revolving electrons, the nucleus with its protons and neutrons, the almost infinite space between the electrons and the nucleus. Thus the electroscopic view of matter is different from the one obtained through the naked eye. To use another analogy: The Christian thinkers admit that in the Heavenly Beatific Vision (the Intuitive Vision), we will have an altogether different view of things: the heavenly vision will be at an infinitely higher level than the earthly vision. After all, the mystic vision or ecstasy (rapture) is only a forerunner and foretaste of the Beatific Vision. Again, atomic physics has shown that the whole universe of matter can be converted (at least theoretically) into simple energy, following Einstein's equation, $E = MC^2$. So energy, unlike matter, is the only substance out of which this world of astounding multiplicity and diversity is formed; simple energy packets formed into electrons, neutrons, protons etc. in different numbers and proportions, give rise to the world of myriads of beings, to beings of amazing plurality and diversity: Thus even atomic physics reveals the basic unity of all beings. Moreover, reason also tells us there should be basic unity of all beings: everything comes from God, is permeated by God, returns to God; the world cannot be standing apart from God, the Supreme Spirit: God should be the all-comprehensive; nothing can be outside God; there cannot be the Infinite plus the finite. Thus we have reason also in support of the transcendental experience or paramārtha-experience or the unity-experience. Once this truth of the two levels or planes of consciousness (experience) is missed, all sorts of confusions and difficulties will ensue. Dr. Koothottil's statement that a definition of mystic experience should exclude God because the Buddhists are atheistic, seems to be based on half-truth; for, it is well-known that for all practical purposes, Buddha is the God of the Buddhists; think of their prayer: *Buddham saranam gacchāmi* (I take refuge in Buddha); besides, Buddha himself was a believer in God, in the opinion of the best Buddhologists.

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Reviewer's Rejoinder*

The core of my criticism of Kattackal's work was that the way he argues after posing the problem in order to reach his conclusions is not convincing. And the major part of my review gives reasons for it. To this Kattackal has nothing to say in his response. Instead he contents himself with pointing out that the 'whole advaitic system hinges on the concept of the two-level consciousness of man: the *vyavahāra*-level and *paramārtha*-level'.

What I started in my review was that the advaitic outlook has certainly some truth about it, but that it is not the whole truth because of its one-sided and unproportionate emphasis on the aspect of unity, to the neglect of the equally important aspect of multiplicity. When I pointed out the need of critically overcoming the advaitic point of view, Kattackal speaks about the confusion of the interpretation of that view.

It is the datum of our experience that there is both unity and multiplicity, which seems to be contradictory. To explain away the contradiction, Advaita attributes two levels to consciousness and consequently also to reality. We have to start our criticism of Advaita with this grading of consciousness and reality into two levels. A more adequate way to describe reality in its complexity may be to call it multi-polar. This way we can attribute both unity and multiplicity, permanence and change, as two poles of one and the same reality without considering one pole false in comparison with the other.

Thus, it is true that there is a basic unity enveloping the whole universe, which is evidenced not only by *paramārtha*-experience but also by modern physics as the author so eloquently shows. But it is *equally* true that there is multiplicity or diversity which is also the datum of our experience and consciousness. Hence these are not two levels of consciousness nor of reality in such a way that in their mutual comparison one level should have to be written off as false, but are two poles reality and of our consciousness of it. From this point of view it would be better to avoid as inaccurate such talk as "*basic unity*" in order to contrast it with multiplicity which would then appear to be not so basic. According to the dipolar view both unity and multiplicity are basic to reality.

Finally, I beg to differ with Kattackal in his theistic interpretation of Buddhism. Space does not allow me to enter into a discussion with him on his conviction that "Buddha himself was believer in God, in the opinions of the best Buddhologists".

* With this the discussion is closed (G. E.)